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Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

**“Low-Income Students of Color in the U.S. Neoliberal Public Education System: An
Examination of Federal and State Intervention Policies”**

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of

Arts

in

Interdisciplinary Humanities

by

Jennifer Viviana Zamora Castro

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Professor Kit Myers
Professor Sean Malloy

2019

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2019

In dedication to my family: my mother, Dora I. Castro, my father, Pedro E. Zamora, and my sister, Giselle Hernandez-Zamora. Thank you for your love and support.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Jan Goggans, not only for motivating me to pursue higher education but also for guiding me throughout the process. Thank you for believing in me but most importantly, thank you for inspiring me to believe in myself. Thank you to the rest of my committee, Ignacio Lopez-Calvo and Kit Myers for your feedback, guidance, and support. To my closest friends, Heidi, Kassandra, and Elisabeth, thank you for the love and laughter you have brought to this process. To my tia Sofia, thank you for your support and for being a second mother to me. To my sister, Giselle, thank you for encouraging and motivating me every step of the way. To my brother-in-law, Jose, thank you for your love and support. To my mother, Dora I. Castro, you are my rock, my heart, and I could not have done this without you. To my father, Pedro E. Zamora, thank you for motivating me to follow my dreams and for reminding me that I am on this earth to live a life of contribution. Thank you all.

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Abstract

In this thesis I will use a critical policy analysis approach to examine US education reform and its effects on social inequality. I situate my analysis within the rise of neoliberal ideology which prioritizes market-driven values, champions individualism, diminishes social responsibility, and promotes deregulation. I seek to answer research questions such as: how does the United States' neoliberal agenda create, maintain, and reproduce the marginalization of low-income students of color? How is the neoliberal agenda embedded in US education policy and law at state and federal levels? And, how might students of color conceptualize themselves within the larger framework of neoliberalism? As evidence I draw on theory, policy analysis, and existing empirical data on one of the most underperforming public schools in San Diego, California, with most of the students being minorities and low-income: Abraham Lincoln High School.

PART I

Introduction

I was born in Tijuana, Baja California. At only three years old, my parents brought me to the United States in hopes for a better future. To them, and like many immigrant parents, that improved future began with my education. What they failed to anticipate, however, was that the road to quality education, both secondary and post-secondary, was not an easy one, especially for someone like myself: a low-income, Latina, first-generation student. Neither one of my parents attended college. My mother's highest level of education was high school and my father's was middle school. Given their undocumented status, their job options were very limited. My mother eventually found a job as a house cleaner and my father began work as a gardener. Due to their low-paying jobs, my parents found themselves forced to share a tiny two bedroom, one bathroom apartment with my uncle's family of four in one of San Diego's poorest neighborhoods. At the time, my family did not own a car so my mother would walk my sister and I to our neighborhood school. Living in a poor neighborhood also meant attending a school with low resources and underqualified teachers. These were just a few challenges my family faced in the early stages of my education. Fortunately, my mother's boss owned an apartment complex in a wealthier neighborhood and insisted on us moving there, promising we would not have to pay the full rent amount. I recall being thrilled to be moving into a bigger space with just my immediate family after living in a cramped apartment with seven other people. Nonetheless, the challenges did not end there. With a new neighborhood came a new school and yes, a wealthier neighborhood meant a better funded school with more resources and qualified teachers, but it also meant leaving my friends behind and adapting to a new culture. I went from going to a predominantly Latino and Black school to a White one. The new school's curriculum was also more challenging and the older I got, the less my parents were able to assist me with my homework. I eventually learned that if I wanted to succeed in a school environment, both, socially and academically, I would have to adapt and assimilate to American culture. This was not an easy process as I felt I lived in two very different worlds: school and home. My parents knew very little English so I only spoke Spanish at home and at school, I was encouraged to only speak English. But language was not the only factor shaping my hybrid identity. Given San Diego's proximity to the border, my family and I traveled to Tijuana to visit family almost every day after school. I remember hastily finishing homework in the car on our way there because I knew we would not return until late at night. From a very early age I knew that my quotidian life and my identity as a Latina living very close to my country would influence my performance in school, but it was not until I got to college that I realized how much more work I had to do just to get to there, and part of me felt exhausted. This project has helped me realize that I should not attribute my disadvantages to my parents' incapability of helping me with homework, or to my daily trips to Mexico to visit family and stay in touch with my roots, or to my personal identity crisis as a low-income, Latina, and first-generation student, but rather on the ideological system that refuses to acknowledge my political, social, and cultural differences.

I have learned that like me, there are many other students who are placed at a disadvantage because the U.S. education system fails to acknowledge the structural and ideological barriers that many of us low-income first-generation and students of color face. The refusal of such acknowledgement is made evident in the rates of poverty among the Black and Hispanic communities, which are intrinsically tied to education. According to the United States (US) Census Bureau, in 2017, the overall poverty rate was 12.3% with Blacks having the highest poverty rate at 21.2% followed by Hispanics, any race, at 18.3%. Non-Hispanic Whites had the lowest poverty rate at 8.7% followed by Asians at 10%. Additionally, 24.5% of adults over 25 years old without a high school diploma were in poverty versus 4.8% for those with a college degree. Those with at least a bachelor's degree had the lowest poverty rates in 2017 (US Census, 2018). These statistics speak to the larger political and structural ideologies that maintain education inequity in the United States, a topic that many scholars have studied. Existing research focuses on students' low income, status as minorities based on race and ethnicity, lack of parental encouragement, and poor counseling as contributing factors to students' disadvantages (Johnson, Rochkind, & Ott, 2010; Reid-Garcia, 2008; Duncan & Murnane, 2011). While an extensive examination of these characteristics is important, there must also be a focus on the *ideologies* motivating unequal access to quality education, specifically impacting low-income students of color.

My personal story has encouraged me to ask: how does the United States' neoliberal agenda create, maintain, and reproduce the marginalization of low-income students of color? How is the neoliberal agenda embedded in US education policy and law at state and federal levels? And, most importantly, how do low-income students of color conceptualize themselves within the larger framework of neoliberalism? These questions are important as they provide insight on how students are directly affected through neoliberal policies and laws. It is already difficult to succeed in a competitive environment, but that difficulty only increases when students are not even aware they are being valued as human capital, placed in a system that views them as an economic investment. To answer these questions, I begin by defining "low-income," "student of color," and "neoliberalism" within the US context. I then provide a literature review of the current discourse on the barriers affecting low-income students of color as well as scholarship on neoliberal education, identifying the gaps in research and adding my ideas to the conversation. The first part of the literature review focuses on scholarship surrounding the conditions of low-income students of color, emphasizing the recurring barriers that place us at a disadvantage. The second part of the literature review is more concerned with neoliberalism in education. Part two of this paper explains the methodologies used to conduct my research and discusses how neoliberalism is infiltrated within policies through notions of governmentality, subjectivity, and race. Then, in part three, I analyze federal and state intervention policies in education, focusing my analysis primarily on three of the most commonly known Acts: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the No Child Left Behind Act (NLCB), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In part four I focus on Abraham Lincoln High School as a stylized example for how state intervention neoliberal policies affect low-income students of color. I specifically focus on this school for three main reasons: its academic underperformance, its geographic location being in a highly segregated neighborhood by

both race and income, and its demographics as a predominantly Latino and Black student body. Similarly to the policy analysis, I analyze the school's empirical data by placing, both, ideology and practice in dialogue with one another. I expose how neoliberal ideology directly attacks students of color through notions of choice, accountability, and discipline. I also discuss the schools' existing empirical data in relation to the national discourse surrounding low-income students of color. Part five concludes this thesis by acknowledging its limitations, offering possible solutions and introducing a possible new area of research that I would want to explore in the future. The U.S education system cannot be analyzed as an isolated entity as it does not operate alone; it is shaped by larger political, economic, and cultural forces. My research adds to existing research on low-income students of color by placing current scholarship about existing barriers in dialogue with neoliberal ideology to understand how praxis and ideology impact students' academic outcomes in secondary education.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purposes of this research paper:

Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has become the nation's dominant ideology over the past forty years (Harvey, 2005). It is a phenomenon deeply embedded in every aspect of our lives, including our education system. With its primary objectives being privatization, commodification, free trade and deregulation, low-income students of color are often the most impacted by an agenda that seeks to diminish social responsibility while championing meritocracy, personal responsibility, and individualism. Although neoliberalism is generally conceived abstractly as an ideology, one way its materialization is made evident is through policies, laws, and political rhetoric. For the purposes of this paper, I adopt Henry Giroux's summarization of neoliberalism from his work *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education*, where he describes neoliberal policies as "... an economic Darwinism [that] privileges personal responsibility over larger social forces, reinforces the gap between the rich and poor by redistributing wealth to the most powerful and wealthy individuals and groups, and it fosters a mode of public pedagogy that privileges the entrepreneurial subject while encouraging a value system that promotes self-interest, if not unchecked selfishness" (Giroux, 1).

Low-Income. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), "Research suggests that, on average, families need an income of about twice the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs. Children living in families with incomes below this level—\$48,678 for a family of four with two children in 2016—are referred to as low income." Low-income students are the most affected by neoliberal ideology's promotion of privatization, individualization, free trade, and deregulation since it places their success vis-à-vis meritocracy, blaming the individual for their lack of success rather than on the system.

First-Generation. While this thesis does not limit its analysis to first-generation students, it recognizes that many low-income students of color are first in their families attending school in the US and pursuing higher education. A first-generation student is broadly defined as "... those whose parents' highest level of education is a high school diploma or less. In cases where parents have different levels of education, the maximum education level of either parent determines how the student is categorized" (US

Department of Education). First-generation students are also distinguished between being “privileged poor” and “doubly disadvantaged” since experiences amongst them vary. In his work “(No) Harm in Asking: Class, Acquired Cultural Capital, and Academic Engagement at an Elite University,” Anthony Jack defines “Privileged poor” students as: “... lower-income undergraduates who attended boarding, day, and preparatory high schools... [and] enter college with a propensity for and an ease in engaging authority figures akin to middle-class students...” while “doubly disadvantaged” students are defined as “... lower-income undergraduates who remained tied to their home communities and attended local, often distressed high school [and who] tend to withdraw from engaging authority figures and feel uneasy when forced to interact with professors...” (Jack, 2). Bearing this distinction in mind, this thesis primarily emphasizes the experiences of those that are doubly disadvantaged.

Students of Color. While this term broadly refers to non-Whites, in this thesis it is predominantly used to refer to Black and Latino students.

Significance Statement

Existing scholars have explored neoliberalism’s effect on higher education (Giroux, 2014; Di Leo, 2016) and while that is important, this paper adds to the scholarly conversations surrounding neoliberalism’s impact by focusing on the ways in which neoliberal reform negatively affects low-income students of color in *secondary* education, specifically through its production and perpetuation of neoliberal subject-formation. By analyzing specific laws and policies at state and federal levels, this research seeks to encourage low-income first-generation and students of color to become aware of *when* and *how* they are being oppressed through systemic laws and policies so they may then contest them in the moment, as they occur in time. While this paper specifically focuses on students in San Diego, CA, it speaks to larger, global issues of inequity in education.

Literature Review

The majority of the available research on low-income first-generation and students of color either focuses on pre-college demographics as the basis for students’ disadvantages in secondary and higher education, on neoliberalism as a detrimental ideology that places students at a disadvantage through its promotion of choice and accountability, or on student success/failure and retention in higher education. While all of these research approaches have contributed greatly to the literature of low-income first-generation and students of color, there remains a need to link some of these discourses. As I note in this literature review, many scholars who focus on, say, poor counseling or lack of parental involvement as leading causes for student underperformance, fail to deliberately state the driving ideology that causes such disadvantages. Similarly, scholars who solely focus on neoliberalism as a detrimental ideology broadly, miss its effect on micro-level processes. Furthermore, the conceptualization of education as a market and students as commodities/customers is mostly made evident in higher ed literature even though this idea is also prevalent in secondary education and, therefore, requiring a thorough analysis. The following

literature review provides a comprehensive summary of current research on low-income first-generation and students of color as well as the role of neoliberalism in education.

According to the statistics shown in the US Department of Education's report: "First Generation and Continuing-Generation College Students: A Comparison of High School and post-Secondary Experiences," college attainment is unequally distributed among students (1). While low-income first-generation students of color have the same aspirations as their counterparts to attend four-year universities, research shows that many fail to achieve a college degree and have a lower academic performance (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006; Kim, 2004, Engle & Tinto, 2008). This is due to a variety of factors including, but not limited to: financial barriers, lack of parental involvement, lack of diversity in faculty and staff, lack of resources and funding, poor counseling, poor mental and emotional health, segregation by income, among other barriers, all of which are interconnected.

Racial Segregation by Income and Lack of Resources

In *Diversity and Disparities* Kendra Bischoff and Sean F. Reardon explore the effects of income segregation on low-income communities. In it, they write: "segregation is likely to be more consequential for children than for adults... for children, income segregation can lead to disparities in the quality and quantity of crucial public amenities like schools, parks, libraries, and recreation" (208). They expand their statement by giving a stylized example:

Suppose instead that one's neighbors do not influence school success, but that it is largely determined by the resources in the school—for example, highly skilled teachers. If high-income communities attract those highly skilled teachers—for instance, by paying higher salaries—then residential income segregation will lead to unequal school resources among communities, which will in turn lead to inequalities in educational success among high- and low-income children. We consider this a spatial resource distribution effect. In practice, the effects of segregation may include both compositional and distributional components (209)

Systematic segregation has a huge, detrimental impact on the educational achievement of low-income students of color, not only because many often lack a role model who has undergone higher education, but also because their socioeconomic position forces many to attend neighborhood schools with less resources and, often, less skilled educators.

Hispanic youths are among those in impoverished communities who must deal with the repercussions of racial segregation. Pauline Reid-Garcia highlights the challenges encountered by many low-income Hispanic students by introducing the framework of structural violence to better understand the environment in which low-income students are forced into due to their racial, and socioeconomic status. Reid-Garcia uses Johan Galtung's definition of structural violence to explain educational inequality: "... any constraint on human potential that is due to economic and political structures. It is embedded in ubiquitous social formations and is invisible to most individuals, including those whose lives are directly affected by the unequal and unfair distribution of societal resources" (Reid-Garcia, 236). The education system in the US perpetuates a cycle of

oppression by segregating and resegregating schools through neoliberal policies that defund and close underperforming schools in already impoverished neighborhoods. Reid-Garcia argues that "... the physical structures are of inferior quality... For instance, many schools in poorer communities have leaky roofs, deficient plumbing and heating, problems with lighting, inadequate ventilation, and acoustical inadequacies..." (Reid-Garcia, 237). The material culture of these impoverished schools speak to the limited resources low-income students are given, which highlight the educational inequality in the United States. While an examination of income segregation is useful, it is important to place it in direct discourse with its governing ideology: neoliberalism and its effect on low-income first-generation and students' of color in secondary education. As these scholars have acknowledged, segregation highly impacts a student's performance since it often dictates their access to resources and quality teaching. Income segregation, and particularly school segregation, remains perpetuated by neoliberal rhetoric of choice and individuality. While society may recognize income segregation as a recurring problem, it continues to place the blame on individuals for their inability to break the cycle of poverty rather than blaming the ideology that maintains it. The economic and political structures that Reid-Garcia references can also be read through a Marxist perspective as consequences of the base, or means of production, and the superstructure, or the ideologies that reinforce the base.

Lack of Parental Involvement and Support

Another primary factor that scholars often identify as affecting low-income first-generation and students of color is lack of parental financial support and overall involvement. According to Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, "In 2005, 22.2 percent of first-generation students reported working more than 20 hours compared to 15.0 percent of their peers" (Saenz, 20). The gap between low-income first-generation students and continuing-generation students on this measure is quite alarming. Work often hinders first-generation college students' experience at a higher institution since they are often compelled to pay more attention to their job than actual school work. Their jobs, although helpful in providing financial support, can often be dangerous to the point of hindering the students' eventual degree attainment. Parental involvement remains an important area within first-generation literature as there remains a "... positive association between parental encouragement and adolescents' educational aspirations and attainment has been repeatedly substantiated... educational aspirations are more highly associated with their parents' aspirations for them than with peers' expectations of their educational futures (Kandel and Lesser, 1969)" (Conklin and Dailey, 254). This statement alone, along with others such as "college attendance is determined by some parents for their children even before they enter first grade" (Conklin and Dailey, 255), problematizes the very notion that low-income first-generation students, for the most part, do not have the parental guidance or financial support necessary to determine their college attendance. Most low-income first-generation students are encouraged to enter the workforce once they graduate in order to help their family out. Surely, socioeconomic status plays a role in the type of motivation exerted by the parents. It is detrimental to explore parental involvement, however, without looking at the larger system that yields a lack of parental involvement and compels students to work. Neoliberal ideology individualizes larger systemic practices. By blaming the parents for not being involved in their children's

education, neoliberal ideology actively ignores the factors it also produces: racial segregation, financial oppression, discrimination, etc. Although parents have the “choice” to enroll their children in a high-performing school, opportunity plays out differently depending on their circumstances. Choice is often not a real one, especially for parents who work long hours and simply do not have time to drive their children 30 minutes or an hour to a better school located in a better neighborhood. The parent’s choice is, therefore, limited if they do not have the time or resources.

Underqualified Teachers, Poor Pedagogy, & Lack of Racial Diversity

Low-income schools are also hindered by the limited resources received, lack of funding, and poorly skilled educators assigned. These barriers lead to pedagogical repercussions (Renzulli, 3-4). There is a large disparity between qualified teachers at predominantly White schools and unqualified teachers in low-income schools. Adamson and Hammond assert that “by every measure of qualifications— certification, subject matter background, pedagogical training, selectivity of college attended, test scores, or experience—less qualified teachers tend to serve in schools with greater numbers of low-income and minority students” (Adamson & Hammond, 1). The classroom setting itself is another *space* where low-income first-generation students remain at a disadvantage due to their educators’ poor qualifications especially in pedagogical training. Furthermore, the attitudes of teachers working in low-income communities matter, and are important in facilitating success for their students (Halvorsen, Lee, & Andrade, 182). If education reform does not prioritize training and hiring highly qualified teachers that are motivated to teach, schools in low-income, racially segregated communities will perpetuate systemic violence that continually places its students at a disadvantage. Educational policy cannot overlook the negative impact the market-model has on education. Much like students, teachers care about attending and working for top rated schools. Rigorous policies of accountability affect the school ratings. This neoliberal system not only creates competition amongst students it also allows and encourages competition amongst teachers. This is detrimental to students in low-income neighborhoods since they often lack the resources to succeed academically to begin with, affecting their school’s rating and reputation.

Additionally, research shows that “New teachers in low-income schools receive significantly less assistance than their counterparts working in schools with high-income students... Thus, because they offer significantly less support to new teachers, the schools that demonstrate the most acute need for skilled teachers are, by our estimation, least likely to succeed in attracting and retaining them” (Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Donaldson, 2). In this way, the education system in low-income communities participates in structural violence by depriving their students of basic needs. Furthermore, “... schools serving low-income communities tend to employ teachers who... are less qualified on a number of measures. Schools with high concentrations of low-income students have higher percentages of new teachers... higher proportions of uncertified teachers ... and higher percentages of teachers working outside their subject area. Teachers in such schools also, on average, score lower on various standardized tests... and have graduated from less competitive colleges...” (Johnson, Kardos, Kauffman, Liu, & Donaldson, 3). Again, the lack of qualified teachers in low-income schools sustains a structure of inequality and reproduces disadvantages. Part of students’ success is placed

at the mercy of the teachers employed. The absence of qualified, dedicated teachers in low-income communities constrains students' capabilities and their opportunity to participate in a rigorous curriculum.

Teachers are not the only ones in need of diversification, however. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "... principals are... a racially homogenous group. In the 2011 – 12 school year, a majority of public school principals were white (80 percent), while 10 percent were black and 7 percent were Hispanic. In the 2003–04 school year, the proportion of public school principals who were white was 82 percent, and 11 percent were black and 5 percent were Hispanic" (7). This data consists with the assertion that Western education institutions were not designed for low-income first-generation students of color because, as aforementioned, one of the challenges these students face is the system's refusal to acknowledge their diverse backgrounds, identities, and realities. By depriving educators of color from attaining positions of power, the Western educational system simultaneously diminishes students' academic achievement. The same report by the U.S. Department of Education also found that "teachers of color are more likely to... have higher expectations of students of color... confront issues of racism... serve as advocates and cultural brokers... and develop more trusting relationships with students, particularly those with whom they share a cultural background" (2). These issues should also be attributed to neoliberalism as it only concerns itself with producing machine-like students, uninterested in their cultural or social lives. Neoliberal education reform is disinterested in addressing social problems such as the lack of diversification in schools since it attributes all issues to personal responsibility.

Poor Counseling

Research also shows that high school counselors in low-income communities lack devotion to their students, especially towards minorities and first-generation students, influencing their college application process. High school counselors are required to provide career preparation for all students. They make a huge impact on whether or not students will be motivated to apply to a higher institution. If counselors continue to deny access to students who are already at a disadvantage, then they too become a barrier to the student's overall attainment of a higher degree. According to "Why Guidance Counseling Needs to Change" by Jean Johnson, Jon Rochkind and Amber Ott:

Among young adults who have graduated from high school and at least started some form of postsecondary education, a surprising 6 in 10 give their high school guidance counselors ratings of fair or poor for helping them think about different careers they might want to pursue. Sixty-seven percent give their counselors fair or poor ratings for helping them decide which school to attend, with 35 percent giving the lowest possible rating of poor" (Johnson, Rochkind, & Ott, 76)

Scholars agree that high school counselors need better preparation not only to motivate first-generation low-income students of color to pursue postsecondary education, but also to provide guidance on the application process: how to apply, where to apply, and how to receive financial aid. The lack of effective high school counseling is problematic since it places low-income first-generation students of color at a disadvantage in comparison to their second-generation counterparts whose parents are familiar with the college application/financial aid process, or who attend private high schools with better

resources. This data is significant as it proves that educators of color, contrary to the ones in power, are more aware, understanding, and proactive about low-income first-generation students' double oppression, multiplicity, and intersectionality. Their awareness consequently equips them to employ pedagogical techniques that are advantageous to the students' overall learning experience. Because we live in a time where everything is a competition framed by a market-mentality, schools treat students like commodities. Students who do not show signs of improvement or intelligence become disposable and are often side-tracked and robbed of equal opportunity/access to higher education.

Financial Aid

As aforementioned, college counselors play an important role in motivating students to apply to universities, but also in helping them with the application process. Many low-income first-generation students of color depend on financial/government aid. Although some of them do not have to worry about finding a job because they receive scholarships, their dependency on financial aid ultimately decides where they will go to school. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute reported that

Financial assistance has been shown to be more crucial in the decision-making process for lower-income students, among them, first-generation college students... In 2003, nearly one quarter (24.5 percent) of first-generation college students compared to 19.7 percent of their peers considered their colleges' low tuition status as very important to their decision to attend a specific college (Saenz, 22)

Their approach in deciding where to attend college can often be limiting. If low-income first-generation and students of color were to choose between a highly prestigious four-year institution with no financial aid and a less prestigious school with a full ride scholarship, most of them would choose to attend a less prestigious institution. In other words, their educational goals are hindered by the amount of financial aid they receive. According to San Diego County Fact Sheet Simplifying Federal Student Aid: Grants, Loans, and Repayment of Loans by the Campaign for College Opportunity,

Each year far too many students leave federal financial aid money on the table. In California, more than \$250 million dollars in Pell Grants were left on the table in 2014-2015 because one-third of California's more than 400,000 high school graduates did not complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Among those graduates are some of our most vulnerable students, including low income, first-generation, African American and Latino students" (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2)

The financial aid process is long and tedious, but there is more difficulty in accomplishing it without a parent's or counselor's help and motivation. Even so, we cannot place the blame on neither the parent nor counselor. We must question neoliberalism's foundation in federal financial aid policies and reforms. As Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars have contended, racism is real and one way in which it is camouflaged is through governmental interventions and policies that maintain injustice (Bell 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). One way in which neoliberalism masks the reproduction of inequality is by shifting financial aid from those who need it to those who deserve it based on academic performance. It uses the rhetoric of equality, therefore,

employing a color-blind mantra that neglects racial oppression. Federal financial aid also excludes non-eligible US citizens. Even if a student achieved academically, if they are not an eligible US citizen, they do not qualify for financial aid. With the passing of DACA, undocumented students were able to receive *state* financial aid but Dreamers remain deprived of federal assistance.

Intersectionality

We tend to perceive the barriers of low-income first-generation students of color in a one-dimensional way: “us vs them.” Nonetheless, it is important to recognize students’ multiplicity, complex identities and differences among themselves. Gender, sexuality, religion, and race, etc., often create double oppression. Low-income students of color who are already placed at a disadvantage because of their socioeconomic status and lack of essential resources, are further hindered depending on their identity as individuals. Women are often more excluded than men. QUEER students are often more excluded than heterosexual men and women. In order to effectively address systemic issues, scholars understand the importance of taking into account the gender, class, and race politics surrounding students’ experiences. Gender issues, for example, often go unaddressed (Duane and Stevenson, 160). While socioeconomic status has plenty to do with marginalization and oppression, others find themselves doubly oppressed not only by their race and class, but also by their gender. Gender equity is also part of the larger structure and must be addressed through structural policies. *The Graduates/ Los Graduados*, a documentary reflecting on low-income first-generation students in San Diego, CA, states: “... the dropout rates tend to be higher for Latino boys... one of the things we see is that boys are more likely to become alienated and disengaged in school...” (RealityChangersOrg, 1:46-1:48). In many Latino families, for example, the culture encourages men to work and expects women to submerge themselves in the domestic realm. Because the majority of the Latino population is low-income, students are often forced to drop out and help their families. Another reason why students, mainly boys, drop out of school, according to the PBS series, is because some of them get involved in gangs. The lack of attention to gender and racial disparities by school leaders contribute to poor academic outcomes since “... social processes within classrooms—namely, interactions with teachers—converge in complex ways with general academic challenges to increase risk for adjustment difficulties across multiple domains of functioning” (Duane and Stevenson, 161). By neglecting issues of gender, the education system simultaneously perpetuates passive acceptance of inequalities and discrimination, in this way enacting structural violence on low-income students of color. A student, for example, might identify as undocumented, homosexual, and Muslim. In such a case, it is important to consider that this student is oppressed and placed at a disadvantage not for one identity, but for three. Structural violence, therefore, “... involves looking beyond concepts that can be easily be measured for statistical analysis – concepts that are then identified as the “problem that needs resolution” (Fue et al., 2015, p. 226). It requires a qualitative examination of the lived experiences of people with marginalized identities and making connections to the contexts of their lives. This approach must take into account the contemporary moment but also a historical understanding of how the constructs of Neoliberalism and global capitalism lead to conditions of inequality (Coburn, 2004)” (Saleem, Vaswani, Wheeler, Maroney, Pagan-Ortiz & Brodt, 186).

“Illegality” and “Undocumentedness”

“Illegality” and “undocumentedness” are also important topics explored by many scholars interested in the barriers hindering low-income first-generation students of color. Aviva Chomsky explores the notion of “illegality” in her book *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal*. In it, she focuses specifically on the stories of Mexicans and Central Americans to explore “illegality” and “undocumentedness” as constructions aimed to exclude and exploit. Questions such as: How is “illegality” and “undocumentedness” created and understood? And who really benefits from such status? guide her analysis as she shatters the construction of illegality and exposes it as a false reality built on racialization, inequality, and false promises. As mentioned in her book, there is a dominant myth that Latin American immigrants are criminals. This belief is present in our education system and it affects students of color as they are often hyper-policed and ultimately immersed in the school to prison pipeline system. Zero-tolerance policies mostly affect undocumented and students of color, with most who are arrested remaining in the system or “relapsing.” Chomsky finds the prevalence of systemic prejudice against Mexican and Central American migrants. Such prejudice affects, both, students and their parents and while efforts such as DACA and the DREAM Act have been enacted to relieve some stress, the future of DREAMers remains uncertain. Additionally, by granting some people permission to live here without fear of deportation and not others, policies create division among the immigrant population in the United States. Hillary S. Kosnac, Wayne A. Cornelius, Tom K. Wong, Micah Gell-Redman, and D. Alex Hughes also explore the process of legalization and its impact on undocumented students in their work *One Step In and One Step Out The Lived Experience of Immigrant Participants in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program*. In it, they assert that low-income status and poverty depressed the number of early DACA applications (Kosnac, Hillary S, et al., 2015). Their work raises the question, How are DACA students being used to advance neoliberal ideologies and reduce the “anxieties” of those in power? By analyzing the construction of illegality, we can learn to blame the system and law(s) instead of on those affected by it.

Joanna Dreby’s *Everyday Illegal: When Policies Undermine Immigrant Families* is a text that explores the impact of immigration policies on Mexican families in the United States through a domestic ethnographic approach. While scholars such as Nicholas De Genova, Leisy Abrego, and Amada Armenta, (among others), have written about immigration, families, and children, Dreby enters the discourse in a novel way. By analyzing immigration issues through a sociological framework, she subsequently problematizes the restrictive immigration system as an “urgent social” issue (16). Questions such as: How do we treat members of this unauthorized population? And how does our treatment of this group impact both families with unauthorized members and our society as a whole? All inform Dreby’s advocacy to reconsider illegality through a new framework; one that deviates from neoliberal rhetoric of merit and individual responsibility. Both, her novel approach and thought-provoking questions inform her contention that restrictive immigration policies are detrimental to intimate family life as they promote a culture of fear that may lead to health issues, strengthen gendered labor roles, create webs of dependency, reinforce stigma, and generate internal and external divisions within families. All of these issues are not independent of education.

Undocumented students (usually low-income and first-generation) endure many of the systemic problems caused by their “illegal” status, affecting their performance in school. Dreby’s framework, inquiries, and methodologies crystallize how, similarly to race, class, and gender, illegality serves as social marker that determines one’s access to resources and opportunities. Undocumented first-generation students often suffer anxieties that other students do not have to endure. Obstacles endured include but are not limited to: family separation, fear of deportation (which often leads to health issues), hyper-dependency, and domestic violence. On top of having to study for exams, getting good grades, being involved with extracurricular activities, etc., undocumented students also worry about simply making it home, or losing a family member. All of these are consequences of the public sector: the state, infiltrating itself into the private: the family.

Socio-Cultural and Psychological Implications

The aforementioned anxieties speak to the larger socio-cultural and psychological experiences of low-income first-generation and students of color since many of them are enrolled in public, underperforming schools with poor counseling and underqualified teachers-- affecting their cultural capital. As stated by scholars Ernest T. Pascarella, Christopher T. Pierson, Gregory C. Wolniak, and Patrick T. Pierson in their work “First-Generation College Students: Additional Evidence on College Experiences and Outcomes,” “... compared to their peers with highly educated parents, first-generation students are more likely to be handicapped in accessing and understanding information and attitudes relevant to making beneficial decisions about such things as the importance of completing a college degree, which college to attend, and what kinds of academic and social choices to make while in attendance” (252). The lack of access to cultural capital begins in primary and secondary education and transfers over into higher education. Once in college, many low-income first-generation students of color never meet with faculty, attend office hours, meet with faculty outside of class, or speak to an advisor (Brittany N. Ridge). The economic gaps between low-income first-generation students of color and the wealthier students create social and psychological disadvantages. In an interview with Ivy League Trailblazers, Anamaria, a first-generation college student attending Brown University, states: “When I compare myself to other students at Brown, sometimes I get angry at them if they complain about being really busy... I think, well, they don’t work... I don’t mention work. I don’t mention my family life. Sometimes I avoid telling my professors about my background because I just don’t want to seem like a burden and I don’t want them to pity me...” (Osipova). Anamaria is one of many low-income first-generation college students who does not feel comfortable sharing her identity with her peers and professors. This compels her to remain isolated while the rest of her peers take advantage of the one-on-one conversations with faculty, staff, and their peers. The sociological differences between students directly affect the mental and emotional well-being of low-income first-generation students of color. Not only are they more prone to become anti-social (especially if the school they attend is predominantly white), they are also more likely to avoid asking questions in class and avoid forming study groups, therefore, resulting in poor academic performance. In their work “Cultural Capital and First-Generation College Success,” Susan A. Dumais and Aaryn Ward found that

beyond the usual adjustment to a new environment, courses, and campus life, first-generation students also found themselves learning a new culture involving a

certain style of dress, kind of vocabulary, and/or taste in music. The styles found in the college environment were closely aligned with the cultural capital possessed by non-first-generation students, and first-generation students struggled to learn its aspects (Dumais and Ward, 250-251)

Scholars have found that cultural capital positively affects students' success and educational outcomes. When a student is shy, afraid, or feels like an imposter, they fail to take advantage of the resources provided for them at University. These are the effects of the socio-cultural and psychological barriers stemming from spaces of structural and systematic violence. Instead of blaming the student, the individual, for their lack of confidence, we should ask ourselves how power is culturally and symbolically constructed through structures, socialization, and notions of agency.

Neoliberalism and Education Reform

In 1990 John Chubb and Terry Moe published their work *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, which was an ambitious and (to some) a persuasive text that argued for competition amongst schools. Their research found that private schools outperform public schools because of their superior organization and autonomy. They also contended that without choice, schools remain disincentivized to improve. Therefore, parents who choose private schools over public ones have more of a voice in expressing their children's interests. Chubb and Moe offer a clear outline on how to implement a competitive market system in education. They counteract common objections such as income inequality, segregation, and lack of parental knowledge by arguing that students can receive state scholarships to attend the schools of their choice, attend magnet schools in low-income neighborhoods that provide advanced resources, and attend schools that have received subsidies. Nonetheless, their research fails to discuss parental informed decisions. Their argument for choice is therefore weakened by their neglect to discuss how immigrant parents, for example, can be assisted in making informed decisions based on a foreign curricula. The choice they discuss is not an equal one as it fails to account for parents who are placed at a disadvantage due to differences in experiences and knowledge. Neoliberal "choice" ignores a parents' cultural and ideological groundings by reducing it to a simple "uninformed decision." The idea they put forth is that parents and schools should decide for students-- not the government. This, of course, plays into neoliberalism's ideal of deregulation, one that has repeatedly marginalized low-income students of color because it is more concerned with efficiency rather than equity.

Other scholars have immersed themselves in this conversation by arguing that neoliberal policies in education fail in closing the achievement gap and actually perpetuate inequality amongst races and classes. Among them is Jennifer-Booher Jennings who in her work "Below the Bubble: 'Educational Triage' and the Texas Accountability System" argues that because neoliberalism places more emphasis on competition rather than on the production of critical thinking and useful knowledge, teachers often attempt to remove their school's rating liabilities by placing low-performing students in special education programs (Booher-Jennings, 2005). This is one mechanism in which schools can cheat the accountability system. Teachers categorize students, divide them, and distribute resources unevenly. While neoliberal education reforms often use language that prioritize underachieving students, the systemic injustices occur in the quotidian, most mundane practices and spaces. Jennings brings attention to

the loopholes in neoliberal education policy. Competition promoted through neoliberalism is not just experienced by students. Teachers also feel the pressure of their school's ratings, perhaps fearing job loss through foreclosure.

While some focus on neoliberalism's perpetuation of inequality on a more micro level, others explore how policy itself affects student outcome. In his work *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, scholar Eduardo Bonilla-Silva recognizes choice as a fallacy since it is based on the misconception that all racial groups have equal power and capital. Neoliberal reform fails to acknowledge differences in power and structural inequalities. It is only concerned with producing neoliberal subjects that it disregards issues ranging from white privilege to loopholes manifested in a classroom setting. As Wendy Brown elaborates in her work "Neoliberalism and the Economization of Rights,"

[neoliberalism]...disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors" therefore "... it is important to grasp neoliberalism as an order of normative reason, which, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality that, among other things, extends a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life—from the state to the family, from warfare to the arts, from thinking to desiring (Brown, 94)

The circulation of literal money is just one aspect of neoliberalism, but there needn't be money involved in education to understand that it is still a *model* of the market in which students are market-actors. The market model is so infiltrated and normalized in every aspect of our lives, making it difficult for us to see where it is happening and how it is materializing itself. In order to attack such oppressive ideology we must acknowledge its existence in laws, policies, and political rhetoric.

This paper should be categorized as activist scholarship, with its target audience being low-income students of color. Although Giroux specifically refers to higher education when he argues that "we need a permanent revolution..." (Giroux, 20), I extend his sense of urgency to secondary education as well. This revolution in education needs the leadership of low-income students of color. It is time to reimagine education as a physical and ideological space that dismisses neoliberal ideals and promotes democracy, morality, and social responsibility. I argue that such reimagining cannot occur without first identifying when and how our identities are defined and reproduced. We must acknowledge neoliberalism's infiltration in education reform, but more than that, its materialization in very naturalized, quotidian ways. Poor counseling, lack of parental involvement, underqualified teachers, illegality, and racial segregation are only consequences of the real problem. These are the issues that arise from a much rooted problem. By analyzing US education policy and law at, both, state and federal levels, we can examine how neoliberal ideology creates, maintains, and reproduces the marginalization of low-income students of color.

PART II

PROBLEM STATEMENT, PURPOSE, METHODS AND THEORY

The literature review clearly outlines the problem in education. Low-income first-generation and students of color continue facing inequality in education despite national graduation rate increase (Balfanz et al., 2014). Meaning that non-White students continue graduating at a much lower rate than their Asian and non-Hispanic White counterparts. Clearly, this is problematic because as the evidence shows, Blacks and Hispanics have the highest poverty rates partly because they achieve bachelor degrees at much lower rates. Poverty and lack of quality education are directly linked to one another. Black and Hispanic youth have trouble breaking the cycle of poverty because existing education policies fail to address the systemic issues discussed by the aforementioned scholars. In 2017 alone, Hispanic and Black youth had higher status dropout rates than White and Asian Youth (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). While it is important to recognize progress, we must also acknowledge that education inequality persists and the fight for equity is far from over. Low-income schools continue facing disparities in quality teaching and counseling, monetary resources, and staff diversification, etc. All of these factors impact student life after high school. The US has implemented many neoliberal educational reforms throughout the years in efforts to close the achievement gaps. Nonetheless, these reforms have failed to do so because neoliberal ideals such as choice, individualism, accountability and deregulation have detrimental effects on the underprivileged populations it attempts to serve. The global, national, and local problem is that we are living in a time where everything is market-driven. Students are commodified, and schools are viewed as sites of profit (Ball 2007). We are living in a time of war on social responsibility and the common, public good. The evidence shows the disparities in education, but the real problem lies in our solution. What are we, as a nation, doing to alleviate such inequity?

The purpose of this thesis is to understand how neoliberal ideology materializes itself through education policy, affecting low-income first-generation and students of color. In order to understand neoliberalism's effects on students' performance, outcomes, and experiences, this thesis uses a critical policy analysis (CPA) approach. This approach requires theoretical discussions, policy analysis, and empirical data to reach its conclusions. CPA derives from critical discourse analysis (CDA) which focuses on discourses as reflections of power dynamics. CDA uses many methodological approaches that are used to examine ideologies and analyze power relationships, one of them being theory (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Building on that, CPA assumes policies can also be read as texts that are embedded in varying discourses and ideologies. Not only does it work to identify the dominant discourses and ideologies, it does so by using critical race policy analysis to understand the racialization of policies and its direct linkage to

language and discourse (Simons, Olssen, and Peters 2009; Taylor 2004; Parker 2003). As I later explore in part three, policies such as ESEA, NCLB, and ESSA use *inclusive* language such as “...provide equal educational opportunities to disadvantaged students,” or “...close student achievement gaps by providing all children with a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), but employ a neoliberal accountability system that ultimately *exclude* communities of color, perpetuate racial inequality, and produce certain subjectivities. One of the primary questions this thesis attempts to understand is: What do federal and state accountability policies mean for first-generation low-income and students of color? To answer this question, this section explores neoliberalism, subjectivity, and race through 1.) Foucauldian notions of governmentality which provide methodologies for reading both federal and state policies as proxies for subject-formation and 2.) the Marxist concept of false consciousness and relative autonomy coined by Louis Althusser which help make sense of macro-level policies. Both, Marxian and Foucauldian approaches help us understand neoliberal subjectivity and its impact on low-income first-generation and students of color. This discussion will sum up the first step in critical policy analysis: theory. The next part of this thesis focuses on the second step: policy analysis. It revisits three of the nation’s most important school reforms: ESEA, NCLB, and ESSA as studies of the larger implications of neoliberal accountability in education. Finally, in part four, I conclude the critical analysis policy approach by using Abraham Lincoln High School as a stylized example to analyze the effects of neoliberal policies on a more local level. The empirical data for this thesis derives from the US Department of Education as well as the California Department of Education both of which are updated annually with new data. The analysis will use data from the 2017-2018 school year (some from 2014-2015, and 2016) and will primarily focus on academic performance, graduation rates, suspension rates, and discipline. In this section I also shift my analysis from federal intervention to state modes of accountability and intervention. While there is a large body of research that covers neoliberalism and education (Giroux 2014; Harvey 2005), an examination of Lincoln High’s empirical data will add to the broader, national and global conversation on the state of education in neoliberal times. It will shed further light on how accountability policies affect students on a more local level.

Neoliberalism, Subjectivity, and Race

In order to understand the socio-political and economic context of today’s education system, we must first recognize neoliberalism as the ideology that governs every aspect of American life. One primary goal of neoliberal reform in education is to close the inequality gap among white students and students of color. Theoretically, the neoliberal state achieves this purpose by promoting competition, choice, and accountability. This framework for education, however, is used to advance

neoliberalism's larger agenda of governmentality, which is: deregulation, privatization, commodification, free trade, and personal responsibility (Harvey 2005). In order to achieve this larger agenda, the neoliberal state enacts subtle, naturalized policies that increase the socio-economic gaps amongst the wealthy few and poor majority. The question is: if the neoliberal state seemingly seeks to deregulate, then who is regulating and how? One answer is through surveillance, policing, and prisons (Bakker and Gill 2003; Harvey 2005; Wacquant, 2001). The other answer, however, has to do with subject-formation and self-government.

Technologies of the "self" help us understand how subjects either exercise power or surrender it. Low-income students of color, specifically those in high school, cannot generate radical change in education if they do not break away from their unconscious cultural assumptions by recognizing the exact moments when their identities are being created and reproduced. As students of color, we must all admit that we become part of the problem when we neglect criticism of the "real conditions of our existence" (Althusser). So, why examine law in order to understand systems of inequality? The macro-level policies implemented by a neoliberal state directly affect the micro-level processes of subjectivity since 1.) law is often created under specific circumstances to serve a group of people at the expense of others and 2.) the identities and subjectivities of students affected are constructed through and by law. Meaning, our questions and concerns should be directed toward the law itself. Neoliberalism is not solely a way of governing states, it is also deeply concerned with producing neoliberal subjects. Through the promotion of individualism and choice in neoliberal education reform, the government intervenes by inducing a *false consciousness* in us, leading us to often act against our own interest. While the Marxist term of false consciousness helps us make sense of the macro-level processes, Foucauldian theory on governmentality as well as Althusserian notions of subjectivity and interpellation allow us to read policies and laws as proxies for subject-formation. Although Marxian, Foucauldian, and Althusserian approaches often conflict with one another, each one provides fundamentals for understanding neoliberal subjectivity and its impact on low-income students of color.

Neoliberalism is not simply an economic policy; as Wendy Brown asserts, it is itself a rationality for policy: a mode of governance concerned with governing the state, constructing subjects, and producing a new social organization through notions of citizenship and behavior (Brown 2203). Through the promotion of individualism, the rationality in education policy takes the form of a business or company's culture. In doing so, it constructs subjects that are highly concerned with the entrepreneurial self. This rationality not only creates the ideal student, it also authenticates the ideal, productive citizen. Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality, conduct, and subjectivity can be used as a methodological tool for understanding how subjectivities are created through *practices* which infiltrate the mind and body:

[Technologies of the self]... permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner as to transform themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power (Foucault, 177)

Neoliberalism promotes deregulation so that people may exercise responsibility upon themselves through self-policing, subsequently acting accordingly as the state's ideal citizens. Education reforms promote self-governance through rhetoric of choice, entrepreneurship, and individualism. Students may think they express freedom and autonomy when really they remain subjects to a neoliberal form of subjugation. As Althusser argues in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus," individuals with less power become subjects not only to law but to dominant ideologies through processes of interpellation. His idea of subjectivity can be situated along Marxist theory as he focuses on the reproduction of the means of production. He problematizes Marx's structural analysis of society by arguing that it is reproduction which ultimately determines the base-superstructure complex since it requires "a reproduction of its skills, but also at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression" (Althusser, 8). According to Althusser, the primary way in which reproduction is accomplished is through the legal, ideological, and political superstructure which he divides into the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), with education, of course, falling into the former category. While Foucault does not necessarily agree with Althusser's concept of subjectivity, he recognizes that power operates subtly within social institutions. In education, specifically, disciplinary power occurs in the form of standardization and accountability. Students are not only molded to meet standards, through rituals and quotidian practices, they also learn to self-apply it.

Policies and laws are materialized in our quotidian life, manifesting themselves in very naturalized ways and because the ideologies governing policies and laws are not overt, it is often difficult for us to challenge them, especially because we are conditioned to accept them as truth. As Foucault says: "[Productive power] applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (1982, 212). For example, immigration policies governing our nation today do not explicitly reveal an agenda of White supremacy through a process of exclusion. Hence, Americans often view "illegal" immigrants as criminals who are breaking the law, rather than focusing on the laws that created these identities with the sole purpose of

criminalizing them. Being undocumented is not an innate or natural identity; it is created through and by law, but most undocumented immigrants internalize people's ideas and representations of them, accepting themselves as subjects of the law. In order for people to challenge the law, they must first recognize they have been conditioned by a larger agenda that employs its power in everyday life rituals and routines.

The same logic can be applied to students of color. Educational policies and reforms treat students as human capital, but they fail to value every student equally. Instead, neoliberal education reforms condition students into believing their success/failure are simple outcomes of "individual choices." Thus, the ideology of individualism that neoliberalism promotes works *subtly* in creating subjects of domination. When students are given the "choice" to attend any school they want, they may believe they have a genuine choice and that in choosing they are expressing their true self, true identity, or individuality. The laws that promote school choice and voucher systems, therefore, create a process of interpellation where students subconsciously become subjects of a dominant neoliberal agenda that promotes and sustains inequality. It is important to note that while laws generate a process of interpellation, the creation of laws themselves are not the points where interpellation takes place. Interpellation takes place in the quotidian life-- in the precise moments when students or parents are presented with the opportunity to "choose" their school of preference. Interpellation happens the moment the ideology *congeals* (Althusser). It is through the formation of "self" and subjectivity that the neoliberal government intervenes while promoting deregulation. When low-income students of color discipline themselves, they simultaneously reproduce power relations, both, the results and processes of subjection. As mentioned in David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*: "Neoliberalism... has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world" (3). Althusser's notion of interpellation demonstrates the social process for which neoliberalism governs our ways of thought, whether consciously or not, and furthermore, our internalization of it. Students do not simply regard themselves as human capital, or an "investment" for the nation's economy; rather, this identity is presented for students to either accept or reject through a consensual, subtle, "non-violent" process of interpellation. Paradoxically, the process is consensual and subconscious simultaneously.

Race and class are intrinsically tied to the creation of law even though these attributes are not innate to humans. Instead, these constructed identities through and by law are reinforced by the most mundane processes which normalize racial identities not only to society but to the subjective self. Laws not only create these calculated identities that were never inherent to begin with, they also legitimize them to control people's behavior. By focusing on the racialization of laws/reforms we can examine race as an ideological foundation for neoliberal ideals such as individualism and meritocracy.

Neoliberal rhetoric constructs people of color as “lazy” and “government-dependent.” This construction serves as a justification for the elimination of social responsibility. Instead of recognizing, for instance, that racial segregation remains a huge determinant in student outcome, neoliberal reform endorses a color-blind mantra that perpetuates inequality in education. Deregulation, therefore, means disinvestment in communities of color, meaning neoliberalism and racial capitalism are not mutually exclusive. A neoliberal agenda is always a racial agenda. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant write in their work *Racial Formation in the United States*:

Even though the assault on the welfare state required containment of the black movement and its new social movement allies, even though derailing demands for expanded racial democracy and for increased racial equality were the *sine qua non* of the neoliberal agenda, that agenda could not be proposed in such explicit form. It could not be presented as “backlash,” rollback, or resegregation, although it was all those things... Colorblindness would become the central component of the racial reaction... (221)

The racialization of law is not overt and this is why students, specifically, have difficulty contesting seemingly progressive reforms. We must understand that racism has not disappeared; neoliberalism has only rearticulated it. Race has historically defined social structures as well as subject-formation. It has been a guiding ideology for marking the “Other,” while maintaining White supremacy, and reproducing inequality. It is not enough to recognize that neoliberalism generates racialized bodies and processes; we must acknowledge that neoliberalism itself is intrinsically raced.

Since 1964 the U.S. government sought education as one of the primary solutions for the War on Poverty. Education was perceived as the sector that would make the greatest impact on America’s economy, impacting the social and economic mobility of productive citizens. With neoliberalism on the rise in the 1980s, that perspective was maintained but it also expanded the consumer/market model to *all* domains and activities. Not only was education concerned with producing citizens that would contribute to the economy, it also reimagined the structure of education itself to fit a market model. The market model in education, through its perpetuation of racial oppression, is crucial in maintaining neoliberalism as it directly impacts the nation’s economic restructuring. As Marx contends, the means of production create the ideologies that serve to reinforce its economic base. Capitalism functions because it profits off the exploitation of the working class which is predominantly comprised of people of color. The system cannot be maintained without one class’ domination over the other and without the reproduction of the ideologies that maintain it. Education is one of many domains that maintains capitalism not only through its production of active citizens that contribute to the larger economic infrastructure, but also through its own market structure that values some students more than others creating disposable students of color that ultimately impact

their own communities for better or worse. In this way, education policy directly affects how communities of color are shaped and, therefore, how they are regulated.

There is nothing natural about laws (Ewick and Silbey, 39) but we often hesitate to question them because we are conditioned to perceive them as objective. The objectification of law makes it difficult to achieve social change as we must first acknowledge that discrimination and oppression are sustained on structural and systematic levels that are then materialized in very mundane and material ways. By studying the laws/policies that directly affect us as low-income students of color, we can simultaneously trivialize our nation's values. What do these educational reforms say about the values of our American society? How does neoliberal ideology embedded in the nation's educational reforms translate into concrete practices? What message do these three Acts (ESEA, NCLB, and ESSA) send to people of color? Only by examining the role that race plays in the U.S. education system can we understand how it operates to reinforce an inferior status for people of color.

PART III

POLICY ANALYSIS

Federal Intervention Policies and Reforms in Education

Since the War on Poverty in 1964, education has been on the forefront as a solution for many economic and social issues. A year after President Lyndon B. Johnson declared the War on Poverty, he enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as a primary means for resolving poverty and inequality. This Act allowed schools and districts to run state programs with the goal of improving the academic achievement of students who were struggling, especially those who were impoverished, disabled, had learning difficulties, or who were learning English for the first time. It was a reform that ultimately defined the roles of the state and education in relationship to the nation's economy. The federal government was hopeful that education would improve poverty and inequality and because of it, many low-income students received more funding and greater access to schooling. This ultimate hope in education, however, diminished the government's social responsibility to secure its citizens' social and economic welfare. Instead, President Johnson's Great Society used education as a primary means to create informed, educated individuals who would then contribute to the labor market and economy. By investing in people's education, the government simultaneously treated their citizens as capital. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act protected disabled students and those who were learning English for the first time. With neoliberalism on the rise, however, the federal government became less interested in aiding the subgroups who were greatly impacted by segregation, such as African American and Latino students, and more eager to address education problems without

interfering with predominantly white, wealthy schools. Neoliberalism's paradox lies in the federal government's interference in education while attempting to minimize people's dependence on it. The government uses education as a means for promoting individual responsibility and self-dependence all while intervening.

Since the 1960s, education reform has been modeled after market and business structures. Wendy Brown elaborates on this idea in her work "Neoliberalism and the Economization of Rights" by arguing that Neoliberalism "...disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors" (94). The conceptualization of education as a marketplace structures what we do, how we act, and how we think about learning, critical thinking, and knowledge production but while schools are expected to ensure that every student succeeds, the playing field between wealthy students and low-income and minority students remains uneven. By measuring "success" through standardized testing, giving students vouchers for private school tuition, and granting them permission to attend any school they prefer regardless of the district, the United States' federal government seeks to transform education into a privatized market system. Furthermore, neoliberalism's form of accountability is also manifested in education reform. According to John Ambrosio's "Changing the Subject: Neoliberalism and Accountability in Public Education," "Since the early twentieth century, accountability in education was synonymous with efficiency, but the meaning of efficiency began to change around 1965, following the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which required annual audits of program effectiveness" (316). After ESEA, accountability was no longer synonymous to effectiveness. Instead, accountability was reduced to "improved test scores," and after the rise of neoliberalism, accountability became transformed to fit neoliberal ideals of individualism. By the early 1980s, public schools were held accountable for producing citizens that could improve the market and succeed in it. This change came about primarily because of a rapidly changing political and economic context. With neoliberalism taking control, individuals were made responsible for their lack of academic achievement. Instead of placing the blame on the political and ideological system, individuals were expected to self-reflect and understand their failure as a lack of skills and poor reasoning. The neoliberal political rhetoric of the 1980s generated a discourse of individuals as human capital rather than citizens and this is made evident in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Although neoliberal ideology is characterized by individualism, privatization, deregulation, and free trade without state or federal intervention, both, the state and federal governments are often the creators and protectors of free markets. If under neoliberal ideology, neither the state nor federal governments should intervene, why then do they collaborate in creating and maintaining reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)? This is because neoliberal ideology is

materialized through policies and reforms. The federal's and state's role to create new markets and protect them is no different when pertaining to the education sector.

Through George W. Bush's NCLB Act of 2001, the federal government commodified public education. It reduced learning to standardization and mechanization, promoted the privatization of schools, and increased competition among students and schools. In an effort to privatize education and diminish social responsibility, the US government often creates reforms to "improve" education while simultaneously reducing its funding. This Act is a prime example of the federal government attempting to reform education while maintaining a contribution of only 12% of all California public school funding (Weston, 2012). While the Act was in effect, schools had to prove their success by measuring student academic achievement through standardized testing. By measuring "success" through standardized testing, giving students vouchers for private school tuition, and granting them permission to attend any school they prefer regardless of the district, the United States' federal government sought to transform education into a privatized market system. In theory, the NCLB Act attempted to focus on the academic needs of students in low-income schools and communities through the rhetoric of fair and equal opportunity. Parts two and three of the Act's Statement of Purpose state:

(2) meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance;

(3) closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers; (US

Department of Education, 2001).

The Act's Statement of Purpose recognizes the correlation between low-achieving children and poverty, attempting to close the achievement gap through "fair" distribution of resources. Despite its efforts, Hispanic, Black, special needs children, and ESL students continued underperforming in federally mandated improvement goals in one or multiple subjects. President Bush believed the education problem, (at least amongst low-income students of color), lied in the "soft bigotry of low expectations." Hence, he sought to raise all academic standards. In a speech to the NAACP, he stated:

There's reason for optimism in this land. A great movement of education reform has begun in this country built on clear principles: to raise the bar of standards, expect every child can learn; to give schools the flexibility to meet those standards; to measure progress and insist upon results; to blow the whistle on failure; to provide parents with options to increase their option, like charters and choice; and also remember the role of education is to leave no child behind (*The Washington Post*, 2000).

The principles he referred to were neoliberal ones as this was a time of sociopolitical change in which the dominant discourse was shifting from social democratic to neoliberal policies. The rhetoric he employed in the speech mirrored the neoliberal discourse of the time. “Flexibility” in education would be achieved through deregulation. “Increased option” and “choice” reflected the logic of the free-market. Everything, including the education sector, had to align with the nation’s dominant discourse. This is why the Act raises an important issue surrounding the concept of subjectivity. If the education system required restructuring, so did the subject-formations of low-income students of color.

The NCLB Act remains concerned with the production of market actors and neoliberal subjects. It is the federal government’s ultimate interest to conserve free markets, free trade, and deregulation by using education as an investment for the nation’s future economy and labor force. For this reason, everything and everyone that fails to reinforce this ideology is denounced for not taking responsibility for their actions and the nation’s broader interests. This creates a divide between “good citizens” and “bad citizens,” those who choose to become responsible subjects and those who are detrimental to society. Since the education system is modeled in a similar fashion, the same logic applies to its students. Each student’s academic performance ultimately determines their value. The “good student” who takes responsibility for their actions and choices will inevitably perform well, resulting in a higher-ascribed value and better rewards for the future. The “bad student,” however, finds an excuse to blame an external factor instead of themselves; they perform poorly and are valued poorly. Low-income minority students become disposable under neoliberalism’s promotion of free-market ideals. The Act ascribes worth/value to a student based on their ability to succeed (e.g. get good grades, pass exams, etc.) despite the larger structural forces that maintain inequality in education. If a student fails to abide by a standardized curriculum, they become labeled as a “bad student,” unworthy and, therefore, disposable:

Every social transaction is conceptualized as entrepreneurial, to be carried out purely for personal gain. The market introduces competition as the structuring mechanism through which resources and status are allocated efficiently and fairly. The “invisible hand” of the market is thought to be the most efficient way of sorting out which competing individuals get what. (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 137–138)

The NCLB Act makes students responsible for their individual choices. Under this logic, structural barriers needn’t be addressed since the market itself takes care of distributing resources in a fair and efficient manner. Neoliberalism’s “free market” mentality is, therefore, detrimental to students’ educational success not only because students are treated as human capital but also because the ascribed value neglects circumstance. Issues such as racial segregation by income, lack of resources, illegality, and mass incarceration are reduced to outcomes of poor individual choices and largely ignored. Low-income

students of color are discouraged from contesting systemic barriers because they are then labeled as irresponsible; unable to take accountability for their actions. In this way, the same ideology that creates marginalization also reproduces it. It silences the voices of the most vulnerable students.

As previously discussed in this thesis, neoliberalism acts as an order of normative reason (Brown, 94). While students may feel the repercussions of neoliberal ideology in education, seldomly do they think to question a “progressive” reform masked in language such as “equal and fair.” We are interpellated to think and act as market actors, not necessarily because we know the system values us that way but because neoliberalism is so instilled in us, taking shape as our governing rationality. Subjectivity, therefore, becomes a crucial part of the nation’s neoliberal agenda. If students passively assume their subject-formation as neoliberal subjects, perhaps even afraid to contest it, then there would be no need for resisting the nation’s larger global agenda of free market capitalism. The NCLB Act forces us to think about student subjectivity in the marketplace framework. Do low-income first-generation and students of color know they are being valued? Or that they are in a marketplace where their knowledge is measured as capital? While this thesis does not directly provide answers to those questions, it allows one to analyze how the Act functions in a covert way while disseminating the market model to education.

In order to make significant change, students must understand not only when their identities as market actors, investments, and human capital are being produced but also when and how they are being governed: low-income first-generation and students of color must learn the game of government. The federal government relies on the rhetoric of freedom to advance its neoliberal agenda. A student is “free” to choose which school they want to attend to, they have “agency” and consent.” Freedom, in this case, constitutes a form of subjugation, a concept that is not a new one (Pettit, 1996). Freedom, when infringed upon through interference, becomes a form of domination. The federal government under neoliberalism rationality seemingly seeks to deregulate and impede state intervention, but the NCLB Act interferes not only by having explicit guidelines on how the state should measure student success, but also by framing freedom as an individual choice rather than recognizing it is one directly impacted by larger political and socioeconomic forces. In this sense, this federal policy acts as a generator and protector of the larger neoliberal agenda by commodifying education and producing and dominating neoliberal subjects.

Subject-formation, is therefore, obscured in a highly subconscious process. The ideology of individualism and choice that neoliberalism promotes, materialized in the NCLB Act, creates what Marx calls a “false consciousness.” Students are so interpellated into neoliberalism’s repressive ideologies of individualism, school choice, and deregulation that it leads them to often act against their own interest. Every school that

wanted to receive federal school funding needed to comply to the NCLB Act's assessments. Based on Althusser's notion of interpellation, schools function as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) meaning they produce certain subjects, in this case neoliberal subjects and market agents. As quoted in *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*: "In other words, the school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how,' but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice.' All the agents of production, exploitation and repression, not to speak of the 'professional of ideology' (Marx) must in one way or another be 'steeped' in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'consciously'" (Althusser, 89). Since schools function as ISAs, they recruit students into oppressive ideologies (e.g. neoliberalism) in a subtle way, making students believe it was their choice to act a certain way instead of enabling them to think critically about the real conditions that are often chosen for them. The neoliberal ideology is embedded in policy which is then materialized in very real, quotidian ways. The NCLB Act is undoubtedly a neoliberal educational policy that makes students believe they can express their individuality by having a genuine choice, but it fails to help students think about their real conditions which are intrinsically tied to a larger economic structure. This is precisely why it is so important to place theory in dialogue with the very real conditions students experience. In the literature review, I discussed how many scholars write about lack of parental involvement, for example, as one of the primary causes of low-income first-generation and students' of color failure. Nonetheless, there needs to be more of an emphasis on why our conceptualization of lack of parental involvement is problematic. When a student is told they can choose to attend any school they wish, they are subconsciously interpellated into accepting underlying assumptions. Students do not necessarily respond to school choice by saying, "hold on a second, my parents work minimum wage jobs, long hours a day. They do not have the time or the means to drive me to a private school thirty minutes away from where we live!" And, we as students, especially secondary students, do not necessarily attribute our social conditions to a larger economic structure that seeks to keep the rich wealthy and the poor broke. Additionally, low-income first-generation and students of color come to accept their fate at a disadvantaged school as theirs or their parents' own personal choice. This is just one example of the way we can place what has been discussed in the literature review (poor counseling, lack of parental involvement, low resources) with neoliberal ideology which actively seeks to sustain inequality. The social assumption is that everyone gets to decide where they want to attend school and what grades they want to receive depending on how hard they study and how much effort they put into their classes. The truth is, however, that the NCLB Act's conditions, regulations, and expectations, simply manifest the neoliberal ideology in a very subtle, passive way. In order for there to be change, students must recognize the points where interpellation happens, or as Althusser puts it, when it

congeals. Perhaps it occurs through an appealing pamphlet, or when a teacher or counselor asks a student if they intend on applying to charter or private school. Whenever or however it may be, interpellation often congeals through a naturalized process, one in which assumptions are seldom questioned. Through Marxian and Althusserian theories of ideologies, we are able to see how students, specifically low-income first-generation and students of color, become subjects to a dominant ideology. Policies such as the NCLB Act delude students into believing they can express their individuality through choice which impedes them from recognizing they are the subjects of a larger ideological structure.

What is dangerous about the Act, however, is not so much its concern with literal capital through the promotion of privatization and school choice, but rather the way in which it masks capital as a metaphorical concept. Whether knowingly or not, students view education as an investment. Similarly to a marketplace, we expect a form of *exchange* or *compensation* for our hard work, time, and dedication. Capital is therefore, conceptualized metaphorically allowing us to theorize about costs, rates of return, and concepts of value without limiting our theorization solely in terms of literal money. The costs in neoliberal education, for example, are often measured in the amount of time students spend studying, the percentage they receive on grades and exams, and the hours of extracurricular activities. The students' worth depends on the value ascribed to their hard work and dedication. If the student proves worthy, the rate of return/compensation comes in the form of being accepted into a prestigious university and later on, getting a stable, well-paying job. Nonetheless, oftentimes what determines the quality of education a student receives is highly dependent upon what kind of family they are born into and the resources they receive. The NCLB Act places competition at its center but it highly ignores the power of inheritance. The logic behind the Act is that more competition between school districts and public and private sectors will eventually pressure schools to offer quality services to their customers. In turn, the quality of the resources provided will play a major role in determining student success. Depending on the student's circumstances, however, some must work harder to buy or attain quality resources, if they do so at all. Those born into a privileged family, however, inherit resources that often give them an upper hand in the competitive environment of education. While neoliberal education offers "choice," the playing field remains dependent on external factors such as the social position of one's family. By promoting competition, the NCLB Act simultaneously requires constant state intervention to relieve the market's conditions.

Neoliberalism's ideology of competition is not only manifested in the form of school choice. Competition is highly visible in the Act's system of accountability since it is what pins schools, students, and teachers against one another in their fight for the best scores and rankings. Not only does the rigid accountability system reproduce the neoliberal ideology through false ideas of meritocracy, capacity and worth, it maintains it

through ritual. Some scholars have argued that neoliberalism is so embedded in every aspect of our lives that it is nearly impossible to imagine any sort of alternative ideology (Harvey, 2005). While this may be true, it is important to understand that it is mainly through ritual and every day practices that reinforce this ideology and make it nearly impossible for us to imagine social change. The NCLB Act's accountability system is ultimately a reflection of policymakers' devotion to the nation's overall market-driven values rather than students' knowledge production and critical thinking skills. The Act provides more funding to the schools with higher test scores and takes away funding from those who are performing poorly, which happen to be those that lacked resources and qualified teachers to begin with. The standardized exams are ultimately designed to divide schools into two categories: successful and failing. If the "failing" schools cannot prove they are making adequate progress, the risks include losing funding, becoming privatized or charter, and ultimately losing students through the promotion of competition (US Department of Education, 2002). The Act allocates funds for students who are not succeeding by offering them private services such as tutoring or voucher programs. Consequently, the "failing" schools, usually those that are placed at a disadvantage to begin with, lose funding to more equipped, qualified, private institutions (Miner, 2004). This harsh accountability system also creates divide within schools. Students who perform better than their counterparts, those with higher grades and test scores, for example, are valued differently and given more attention than their counterparts. In this way, students become commodified. Ultimately, the federal government diminishes its responsibility by intervening through the creation of accountability and competition. In other words, schools do not necessarily need more funding to be effective, they just require more competition.

Charter schools, which are public schools of "choice" are often overrepresented by Latinos as they make up over 30% of all students (US Department of Education, 2015). Research also suggests that Latino students attend highly segregated schools. As Orfield and Frankenberg (2008) found, 60% of Latinos in the bigger cities of the west coast attend segregated schools where 90% of the student population are students of color. Racial segregation in charter schools and traditional public schools has only increased (Frankenberg et al., 2012; Ladd, Clotfelter, & Holbein, 2015; Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012; Whitehurst, Reeves, & Rodriguez, 2016). These findings, however, only tell part of the narrative; the other part has to do with understanding the ideologies generating these kinds of disparities. Neoliberalism works to perpetuate school segregation and inequality as it neglects the varying levels of power and capital that students may have. By masking structural inequalities through rhetoric of choice and individuality, the federal government frees itself of responsibility to actually address unequal access to quality education in their education reforms. It is the neglect of structural inequalities that causes students to remain in segregated schools, perpetuating a

cycle of oppression and disadvantage. Education, hence, becomes a commodity where only the privileged can attend the best schools and access the best resources. Neoliberal ideology promotes the market-model to every aspect of society, including and especially the education system. Just like the market, those who are wealthy and privileged succeed while those who do not, either fail, or work twice as hard for the same outcome.

Overall, the NCLB Act of 2001 was the federal government's way of intervening from a distance. In their examination of neoliberalism and education in Australia, New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom, and, and Sweden, Whitty et al write, "In this system, government "steers at a distance, while the notion of the free economy is extended to a marketized civil society in which education and welfare services are offered to individual consumers by competing providers than provided collectively by the state to all citizens" (Whitty et al., 1998, p. 35). The federal government achieved neoliberalism's ideal of deregulation by forcing its subjects to regulate themselves. The idea of choice and individuality put forth by the NCLB Act's agenda of competition and accountability, interpellated parents and students alike into believing that students are better in private schools, and that it is truly their choice (without recognizing external structures) to attend any school they want.

When President Obama took office in 2009, the goal for the nation's education policymaking was ultimately to get rid of the NCLB Act and generate a reform that promotes more innovation and local learning (McGuinn, 2016). Instead, the Obama administration seemed to almost reinforce the rigorous accountability system as it implemented two initiatives: Race to the Top and Common Core, which allocated more funding to those states that meet federal guidelines and standards.

Race to the Top, a \$4.35 billion dollar program initiated under the Obama administration, provided awards to

... states that are leading the way with ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling, and comprehensive education reform. Race to the Top winners help trail-blaze effective reforms and provide examples for states and local education agencies throughout the country to follow as they too are hard at work on reforms that can transform our schools for decades to come (US Department of Education)

While the initiative's language seemingly gave power to the states by allowing them to "freely" come up with achievable plans and reforms to improve education, each winning state endured a highly selective and competitive process. There was a systemic approach that each state undertook in order for the federal government to ensure that the proposed education reform met its priorities. The Race to the Top Program executive summary outlined the systemic approach that all states had to follow if they desired federal funding. Not only did the administration choose the types of policies that would receive funding, it also outlined the types of oversight systems that would be put in place to

ensure that each state complied to the federal agenda. Part B of the selection criteria, for example, required all states to develop and adopt common standards, implement high-quality assessments, and support the transition to enhanced standards and high-quality assessments. Not only did the Race to the Top initiative promote more competition and reinforce the standardized testing evident in the NCLB Act, it also simultaneously expanded the federal government's power and modes of intervention.

On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) known as the NCLB Act. In many ways, ESSA maintained many of the Act's provisions embedded in neoliberal ideology, specifically testing and standardization provisions as well as English proficiency standards. In other ways, ESSA sought federal deregulation by giving states power to operate funds, generate educational programs, and improve forms of interventions to help their most underperforming students. States were no longer restrained by the US Department of Education's prohibitive techniques in order for gaining access to funding. The federal government also diminished its role in dictating how schools can best help improve underperforming schools (Egalite et al., 2017). ESSA primarily emphasized the importance of English language proficiency in its accountability system and allowed states to set their own standards, goals, and modes of intervention for students who were learning English as a new language (Pompa & McHigh, 2016). While all of these efforts are seemingly beneficial in allowing states to regain control of their student's educational outcomes, it is too soon to make definitive conclusions of the reform's lasting effects. It is also important to note that ESSA was created during a time of recurring neoliberal globalization. Hence, as I have examined in previous policies, it is also embedded in neoliberal ideology. One of the primary ways in which we can analyze this reform is by examining the law in relation to the structures that have marginalized low-income first-generation and students of color in the past: by placing ESSA's provisions on assessment and accountability in dialogue with the rhetoric of choice, since those are the factors that have proved to highly affect low-income first-generation and students of color.

Assessment and accountability systems are not created at random as they are deeply embedded in ideologies that often favor White, English-speaking students. Low-income first-generation and students of color frequently fail to meet many of the federal and state standards because these systems do not prioritize students' cultures, languages, and beliefs. The US Department of Education statistics prove that while there has been an improvement in narrowing the gaps between White students and students of color, it has enlarged or remained the same for English learners (US Department of Education, 2011). In 2015, for example, 46% of white students in the 12th grade were proficient in reading in comparison to only 24% of Latinos. Additionally, 32% of white students in the 12th grade were proficient in math in comparison to only 12% of Latinos (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2018). As previously reviewed in some of the literature on low-income first-generation and students of color, students who do not see themselves or their culture reflected in classroom curricula tend to perform poorly as they are often disengaged with the material. Students who feel disengaged are subsequently more likely to drop out of school. While ESSA does not directly require states to adopt a specific system of accountability, each state is nonetheless expected to have one and schools remain assessed depending on their success, failure, and improvement. Each school is also allowed to choose whether or not they want to abide by previous or existing models. If schools choose to counteract existing accountability processes and challenge detrimental standardization processes, then ESSA has the potential to positively impact low-income first-generation and students of color, but if schools choose to stick to archaic forms of accountability, ESSA will have no real impact on underprivileged students.

Additionally, in order for ESSA to have a notable impact on low-income first-generation and students of color, states must acknowledge the ideology of choice promoted by the nation's neoliberal agenda. As aforementioned, there are systemic barriers that dictate the kind of choices that disadvantaged populations can make. Issues such as lack of employment and poverty cannot be readily solved through education. This is the same type of flawed logic found in President Johnson's ESEA Act in response to the War on Poverty. Instead of viewing them as issues that can be solved by education, schools must consider how poverty and unemployment directly impact students' educational opportunities and access to resources. Policymakers must acknowledge the disadvantages that students face prior to enrolling in school. The existing literature notes lack of parental involvement as one of many causes for low-income first-generation student of color educational failure. By analyzing this issue through a neoliberal lens, however, we are made aware of the danger in how this issue is often presented: as a parental choice. In reality, lack of parental involvement is often forced or involuntary. Many parents either lack the knowledge to help their children as they are unfamiliar with the U.S. education system, or do not have the time since they work many hours a week just to get paid minimum wage. Student achievement is highly dependent on family life and stability. School reform must take external factors into account, not so much by viewing them as issues that education can eventually solve, but rather as social issues that must be solved, addressed, or alleviated in order for underprivileged students to succeed.

Not all hope is lost, however. Part of regaining agency is by situating social issues that place students at a disadvantage in dialogue with neoliberal ideology and understanding how and when our identities are being formed. The other part of liberating ourselves from the dominant ideology is through what Marx refers to as relative autonomy, intervention, and agency which I discuss in my conclusion. The next part of this thesis emphasizes the first part of the liberation process as it contextualizes much of

the theory that has been previously discussed. The existing empirical data on Abraham Lincoln High School is placed in dialogue not only with the existing social issues impeding low-income first-generation and students of color from having equal access to resources, but also with neoliberalism's agenda in state policies. Much like federal policies and reforms, state policies function to push a neoliberal agenda, affecting student outcome. As previously discussed, much of the existing scholarship about this demographic focuses on the factors that impede or hinder student success, but this thesis seeks to challenge the conventional way in which we understand such social issues by recognizing they are all consequences of neoliberalism.

PART IV

ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF NEOLIBERAL STATE INTERVENTION POLICIES IN ABRAHAM LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

Part of the critical policy analysis approach is demonstrating how theory and practice work together. In part two I discuss how Foucault's theory of governmentality, Althusser's notion of subjectivity, and Marx's idea of false consciousness can help us understand the reproduction of subjugation. I then use these ideas to analyze federal educational reforms in part three. This chapter will specifically focus on existing empirical evidence by using Abraham Lincoln High School as one example for understanding how state intervention and accountability policies affect student outcome in secondary education. It is important to include examples in a critical policy approach as they allow for further conceptualization on how macro neoliberal policies and ideologies manifest themselves on a more local level. Although neoliberalism may have similar effects on first-generation low-income and students of color in different parts of the world (a global problem), each nation responds to it differently by either perpetuating the neoliberal global agenda or dismantling it. I decide to analyze Lincoln High, a school located in San Diego, CA for three primary reasons: its geographic implications, its overwhelmingly low-income Black and Latino student population, and the correlation the two have with its academic underperformance. I begin by providing a brief background of the school's neighborhood and the implications of residential segregation by income. I then use existing empirical data in analyzing the effects of neoliberal state intervention policies. This part of the thesis synthesizes what has been previously discussed: theory, policy, and practice.

Abraham Lincoln High School is located in Lincoln Park Southeast of San Diego, a historically working-class Black neighborhood. Built in 1949, the school originally served middle schoolers but was eventually converted into a high school in 1955. Lincoln was then demolished and rebuilt in 2003-2007 when the student majority shifted from Blacks to Latinos. Many, however, were skeptical about its rebuilding since Lincoln held a negative reputation for its academic underperformance and high gang activity. In 1994, student Willie James Jones Jr. was shot leaving a graduation party. This incident scarred the community and serves as a constant reminder of the gang-related struggles they continue facing. As a Lincoln graduate stated in an interview for the *San Diego Union*

Tribune: “I want the students to understand that the struggles we were fighting back in '94 when Willie was killed are the same struggles that we're fighting now” (Vigil, 2016). Despite the city renaming a street after Willie and the school hanging his portrait in the library, violence in the city and at school persists. In December 2008 the community mourned yet more losses when gang members shot students Monique Palmer, 17, and Michael Taylor, 15 (KPBS, 2008). Until this day, Lincoln is commonly known for its gang-related violence and academic underperformance.

Lincoln was chosen as an example to unify the discourses of the physical and ideological barriers many low-income first-generation and students of color face. The public school's poor academic outcomes reflect the consequences of income segregation by race and neoliberalism's infiltration in state education intervention policies. Despite neoliberal reform efforts, the school remains one of the most underperforming schools in the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD). Its low graduation rates, low test scores, and high suspension rates warrant an urgent examination of the dynamics of class and race in structural and ideological barriers impeding student success in secondary education. In their work *The New Political Economy of Urban Education Neoliberalism, Race, and the Right to the City*, Pauline Lipman argues that in achieving economic and social justice, we must understand the injustices occurring not only in the political economy but also on a geographical level. Lincoln is located in an urban community with the majority of its population being poor Blacks and Hispanics. As scholars have argued, residential income segregation is a primary contributor to unequal school resources among communities and inequalities in educational success among high- and low-income children (Bischoff, 2014). We can only determine how the cultural politics of race are used as validation for privatization and individual responsibility when we recognize the injustices occurring on a geographic level. The social discourse taints people of color as lazy, dependent, and undeserving poor which then validates state deregulation through the elimination of welfare and state-funded programs. The disinvestment in Black and Latino schools such as Lincoln High is caused by the racialization of space and the rationale that space is an area of capital accumulation.

Residential Segregation by Race and Disparities in Education

There is a major geographic divide in San Diego, CA, where residents north of interstate I-8 hold a higher percentage of household earnings than residents to the south:

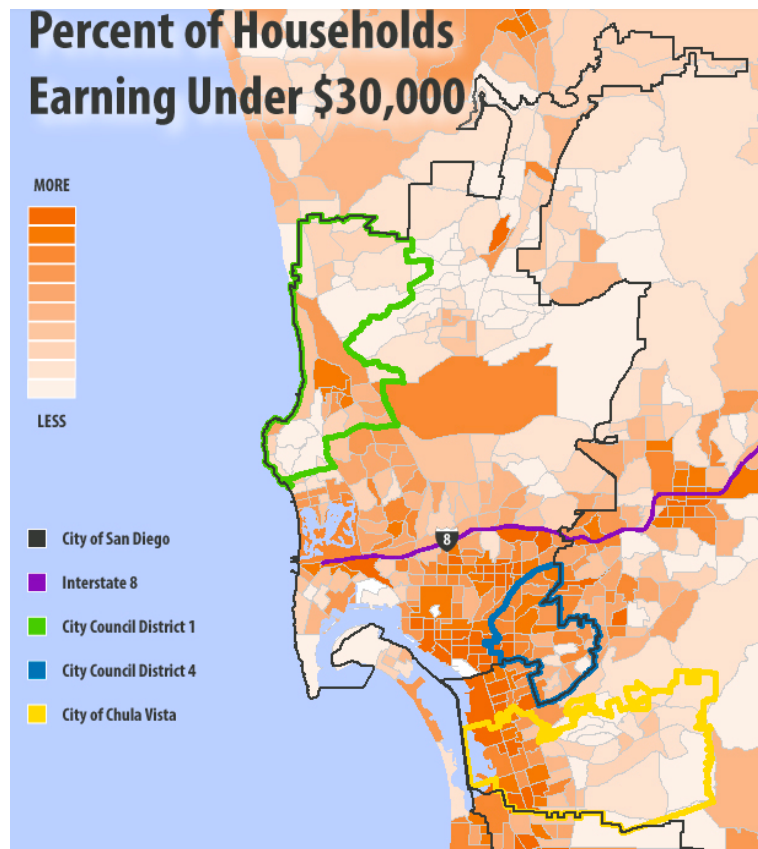


Fig. 1. San Diego racial segregation by income. Source: *U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey Graphic by Keegan Kyle / VOSD*

Segregation by income implies there is an unequal distribution of resources. It is clear that San Diego's southeastern neighborhoods, where Lincoln is located, are much poorer. As research has proved, there is a strong correlation between poverty and lower performing schools, higher crime rates, and higher health issues. This, of course, offers an explanation for, both, Lincoln's high gang-related violence and its students' slow development of academic skills. While some may argue that it is segregation by income and not segregation by race that affects education, I assert that in this case, and in many, both are very much interconnected. The southern region of San Diego consists of predominantly low-income Hispanics (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2016). Lincoln Park, specifically, is comprised of 61% Hispanics, 18.1% Black, 11.8% Asian, 1% mixed, 4.3% other, and 3% White. Hispanics, the majority of the population in Lincoln Park make only \$31.6k/year and Blacks, the second majority \$23.8k (Statistical Atlas). This is evidently below San Diego's poverty line as the city becomes increasingly more expensive.

Neoliberal State Intervention Policies and Existing Empirical Data

Following ESSA, the federal government has pushed for deregulation allowing states to choose how they would like to operate funds, generate educational programs, and improve forms of interventions to help their most underperforming students, hence, the critical analysis approach now shifts from federal intervention to state modes of accountability and intervention. What is California doing to help improve underperforming schools? What are the state's modes of intervention for students who are learning English as a new language? Lincoln's data clearly shows a discrepancy between the increase in graduation rates and socioeconomically disadvantaged students' of color underperformance in both ELA and math. Clearly, students are graduating but are ill prepared for, both, the workforce and higher education. The empirical data validates neoliberal education's disinvestment in critical education. Students are underperforming in ELA and math because standardization, fast-knowledge, and the memorization of quick facts produce a sense of disconnection from true knowledge and critical thinking.

According to the California Department of Education, Lincoln is among some of the schools that meet criteria for support and improvement in 2018-19 since it is one of 481 low performing schools. If a school falls short of California ESSA State Plan, the California Department of Education (CDE) determines whether or not it is eligible for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) and Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI). A school is considered eligible for CSI if 1.) their graduation rate is less than 67% averaged over two years and 2.) not less than the lowest-performing five percent of Title I schools (California Department of Education, 2019). Schools are eligible for ATSI if they have one or more student groups that for two consecutive years meet the same criteria for the lowest performing 5% of Title I schools for CSI. If a school is eligible for either CSI or ATSI, they must develop a School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) to improve student outcomes. Although the SPSA is a local intervention effort it must still meet federal requirements. Lincoln's plan for student achievement was created to improve the academic performance of all students and aligns with SDUSD's Local Educational Agency (LEA) Plan which outlines the district's goals of closing the achievement gap and creating a broad and challenging curriculum: Reading/ELA, generating quality teaching and leadership, developing professional learning for all staff, engaging parents and communities alike, supporting staff, valuing diversity, maintaining a high enrollment of neighborhood students, integrating digital literacy, providing social services, integrate schools and communities, and creating and maintaining a safe school environment (San Diego Unified, 2014). Lincoln's 2017-2018 Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) estimated that in 2018, 43% of their Black or African American students, grade 11 would perform at grade level mastery level in the English/Language Arts portion of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)

standardized test. The test results show, however, that only 2.86% of them exceeded the standard, 2.86% met the standard, 11.43% nearly met the standard and an alarming 82.86% did not meet the standard (State of California Department of Education, 2018). Lincoln's SPSA also outlined goals for Hispanic or Latino students, grade 11 and estimated that in 2018 with the implementation of their intervention policies, 46% of them would perform at grade level mastery level in the English/Language Arts portion of the SBAC. Again, the results show that only 2.13% exceeded the standards, 9.22% met the standards, 29.08% nearly met the standards, and 59.57% did not meet the standards (State of California Department of Education, 2018). The goal for English learners was that 20% of their eleventh graders would perform at grade level mastery level in the English/Language Arts portion of the SBAC. Only 10.42% *nearly* met the standard while 89.58% did not meet the standard (State of California Department of Education, 2018). The same pattern is evident with math. Lincoln's SPSA outlined goals for Hispanic/Latino, Black/African American, and English learners, but the results do not match those expectations. What is important to note is that all of Lincoln's intervention policies align with SDUSD's LEA Plan goals, which I have outlined. None of SDUSD's goals seem to be detrimental to student success. Nobody would argue that intervention support such as tutoring, technology based learning programs, and professional development opportunities are harmful to student success. So, why is it that predominantly Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American schools continuously underperform? I argue that at least within the state narrative, modes of intervention are not harmful in their essence but they are not effective because they are intrinsically tied to neoliberal forms of accountability such as standardization. As long as the modes of intervention are designed to solely pass rigorous tests and ensure students are getting the best grades, students of color will continue facing barriers. ESSA much like the earlier reforms, is more concerned with modeling the public education system after a free market than it is with improving students' learning. While the policies outlined in Lincoln's plan for closing the achievement plan are sound, the way in which student success is measured remains limited by neoliberalism's form of accountability. At least in Lincoln's case, education inequality is worsening.

Graduation Rate. San Diego Unified School District ranked first among five of the largest school districts in California in 2017. Not only were SDUSD's graduation rates high, its dropout rates were low and students' academic achievement increased. But while graduation rates have increased in all of California, academic performance has not necessarily improved for minority groups. This speaks to the persistence of inequality by race in education. In 2018, there was a 0.2 percent increase in graduation rates for Black students from 73.1% in 2017 to 73.3%. Hispanic or Latino students graduation rates increased from 80.3% in 2017 to 80.6% in 2018, only a 0.3% increase. English language learners had a 0.8 percent increase from 67.1% in 2017 to 67.9% in 2018, and low-

income students went from 78.8% in 2017 to 79.6% in 2018, also a 0.8% increase (Swaak, 2018). These were the findings for *all* students in California, but the findings vary depending on districts and individual schools. Lincoln High School has experienced a 1.8% increase in graduation with 78.7% of their students graduating in 2018 but as I explore in the next section, there seems to be a discrepancy between the graduation rate and the students' academic performance and college-readiness. While the graduation rate has increased, the school's overall performance remains in the yellow category, meaning that in comparison to other schools in the SDUSD, particularly in regard to graduation rates, Lincoln is neither underperforming nor overperforming. What is interesting about this data is that while ELA performance has declined and mathematics performance has remained the same at an alarming "below standard" categorization, the majority of students are still graduating. Two subgroups remain in the red category for graduation: English learners with only 65.8% graduating, and students with disabilities with only 50.9% graduating. This category is followed by those in the orange category: African American students with 86.7% graduating, and homeless students with 78.9% graduated. Hispanic students are in the yellow category with 76.3% graduating as well as socioeconomically disadvantaged students with 79% graduating, an increase in both. All other students fell under the "No Performance Color" because there were too few students so the data was not displayed for privacy. The information that was available, however, was that 76.9% Asian students, 91.7% Filipino students, and 63.6% White students graduated:

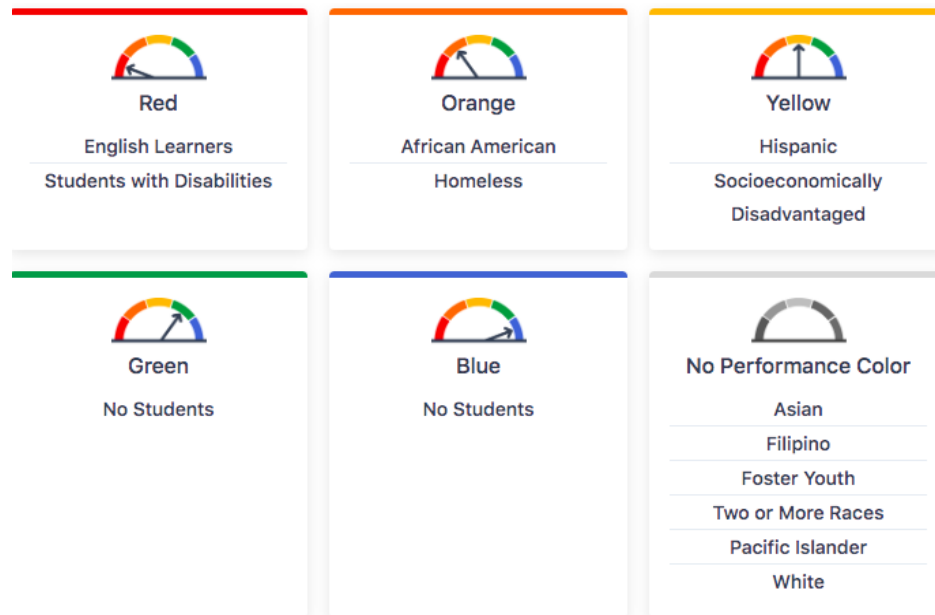


Fig. 2. Lincoln High graduation rate. Source: *California School Dashboard, 2018 Graduation Student Group Details by Performance Levels by State of California Department of Education*

One way in which a school is assessed is through graduation rates. This is used to determine whether or not a school is achieving, underachieving, or making significant progress.

Academic Performance. In 2018 Lincoln had an enrollment of 1,502 students. Out of those students, 18.6% were African American, 3.7% were Asian, 1.4% were Filipino, 68.7% were Hispanic or Latino, 0.9% were Pacific Islander, 2.5% were White, and 2.4% were two or more races (California Department of Education). Meaning, that Hispanic or Latino students, followed by African American students, made up more than half of the population in one of San Diego's most underperforming schools and more than half of the student population, 86.3%, is also socioeconomically disadvantaged. This, of course, is the result of neoliberal privatization and competition ideals that lead to the concentration of Black and Latino youth in the most low-performing schools. While the graduation rate has increased by 1.8%, student academic performance in English Language Arts and Mathematics remain low. ELA performance has *declined* for the following three subcategories: English learners, Hispanics, and socioeconomically disadvantaged.

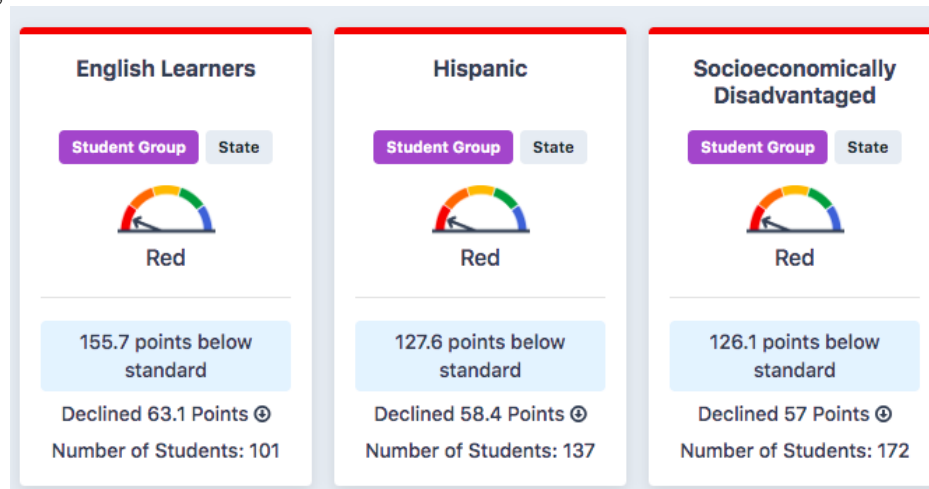


Fig. 3. Lincoln High ELA performance. Source: *California School Dashboard, 2018 English Language Arts Group Details by Performance Levels by State of California Department of Education*

While students' academic performance in Mathematics has been maintained, it has also remained below standard. Similarly, the students underperforming in math are English learners, Hispanic, and or socioeconomically disadvantaged:

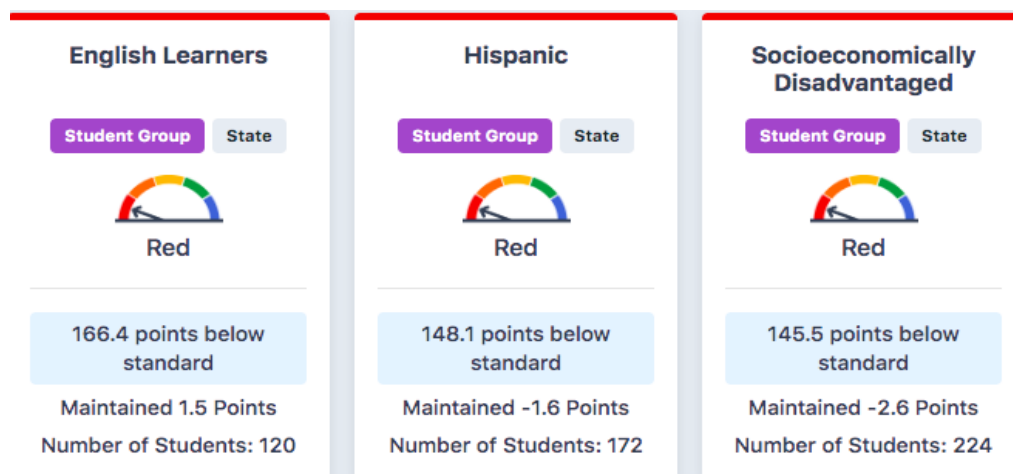


Fig. 4. Lincoln High Mathematics performance. Source: *California School Dashboard, 2018 Mathematics Group Details by Performance Levels by State of California Department of Education*

When the 2018-2019 school year came to a close, the SDUSD removed Lincoln’s principal as well as three of its vice principals. As the Board Chair Dr. Sharon Whitehurst-Payne affirmed in an interview local NBC 7 San Diego News, “‘The problem is that we wanted consistency in the achievement. We have pockets of excellence but we’d like to ensure that we have a uniform process of esteem that our students are achieving’” (Zabala, 2019). Some of the pockets of excellence perhaps have to do with the school’s increase in graduation rates, but as the Chair has recognized, there is no consistency in achievement. By specifically choosing the word “uniform” to describe the process for academic achievement, however, Dr. Whitehurst-Payne employed neoliberal rhetoric that continues the endorsement of standardization in education. While the intention for helping “at-risk” students succeed is there, the means for doing so remain constrained by neoliberal forms of accountability. As one of the leaving staff members clarified in that same news report: “‘I want to make it clear that it’s not the fault of the students, it’s not the fault of the staff. We love our students, we love each other. That’s all I know.’” SDUSD continues blaming individuals rather than the uniform processes it attempts to replicate time and time again. The leaving staff made it clear: the system is at fault, not the teachers nor the students. It is not to say that leadership is not important in influencing teachers and students, but that leadership is itself influenced by modes of accountability.

College Readiness. Furthermore, the school’s college readiness remains in the orange category, again, the second most underperforming category, with only 31.5% of the student population prepared for college or a career. African American students (23.3%) and homeless students (22.8%) placed in the red category for college and career-preparedness, while English learners (22.2%), socioeconomically disadvantaged students

(31.1%), and students with disabilities (8.8%) placed in the orange category, and Hispanic students (32.6%) placed in the yellow category. The other subcategories were placed in the “No Performance Color” due to insufficient data with Asian students being 53.8% prepared, Filipino students (50%), and White (18.2%):

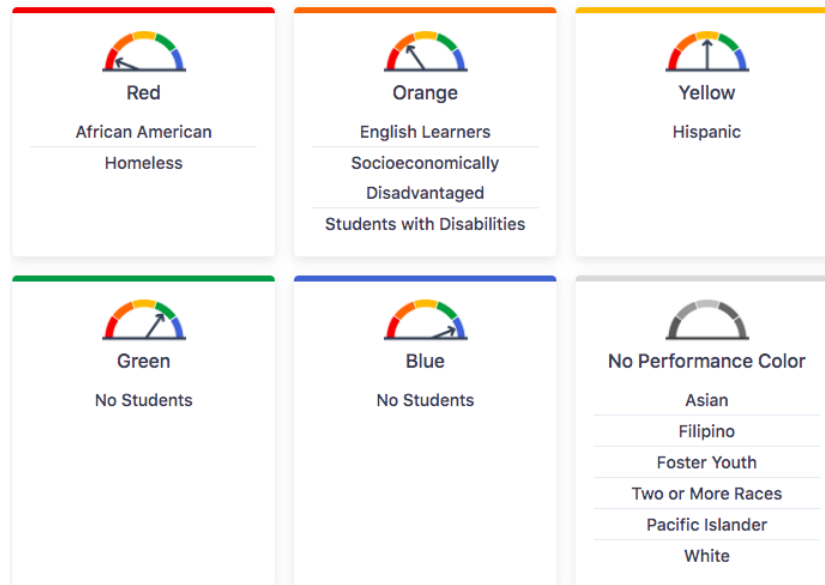


Fig. 5. Lincoln High college readiness. Source: *California School Dashboard, 2018 College/Career Group Details by Performance Levels by State of California Department of Education*

As we have seen in this case, schools feel pressured to graduate students regardless of their knowledge acquired. The pressure is also another detrimental consequence of neoliberalism’s promotion of choice and competition. Not only can Lincoln be subject to sanctions or eventually close if its graduation rates are repeatedly low, it could also lose students to other schools as high graduation rates are symbolic of quality. Increased pressure and competition may therefore lead to increased graduation rates without truly considering a students’ college-readiness.

Additionally, students at Lincoln are not given proper guidance on the financial aid application process. According to San Diego’s county sheet, “Each year far too many students leave federal financial aid money on the table. In California, more than \$250 million dollars in Pell Grants were left on the table in 2014-2015 because one-third of California’s more than 400,000 high school graduates did not complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Among those graduates are some of our most vulnerable students, including low income, first-generation, African American and Latino students” (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2). In the 2014-2015 school year, 68 high school graduates did not complete FAFSA, forfeiting a total amount of \$251, 800 in financial assistance. This speaks to two issues low-income students of color face: poor

counseling and lack of parental involvement. While neoliberalism blames the individual (be it the student, parent, or counselor) for their lack of responsibility, we should highlight the nation's lack of commitment in truly assisting underprivileged students. As with NCLB Act's false promises of providing millions of dollars for resources to help low-income students, so too can we see a discrepancy between the rhetoric in education reform and the reality. It is clear that students are not provided with adequate guidance for the financial aid application process, a crucial resource that can make or break a student's college-making decision.

Suspension Rates and Discipline. Suspension rates in the San Diego Unified School District have increased over the years. According to the California Department of Education, in 2016 the percentage of students who were suspended was 3.4%, in 2017 it was 3.5%, and in 2018 it was 3.7%. The SDUSD's performance overview categorizes performance levels based on color with red being the lowest performing, orange being the second lowest performing, yellow being neutral, green being the second highest performing, and blue being the highest performing. In 2018, African American students were among the highest suspended with 8.8% suspended at least once; they were in the red category. English learners, Hispanic students, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students were among seven other subgroups in the orange category with 2.9%, 4.2%, and 4.7% suspended at least once, respectively. American Indian students placed yellow and Asian, Filipino, and White students placed green. SDUSD also provides local indicators. According to their findings based on different surveys, all standards for parent and family engagement, local climate, and basics: teachers, instructional materials, and facilities were met. Again, rates vary depending on individual schools.

For Lincoln specifically, the overall suspension rates increased from 5.1% in 2016 to 8.1% in 2018. Out of Lincoln's entire student population, African Americans and students with disabilities are in the red category with 16.4% of African Americans being suspended at least once, an increase of 3.2% from the previous year, and 12.8% of students with disabilities suspended at least once. These subcategories are then followed by those in the orange category: Asian, homeless, two or more races, and socioeconomically disadvantaged. English learners and Hispanics fall under the yellow category, and only White students fall under the green. The overall school's performance remains in the orange category, the second lowest performing category, with 8.1% suspended at least once. This categorization speaks to the school's overall conditions and climate:

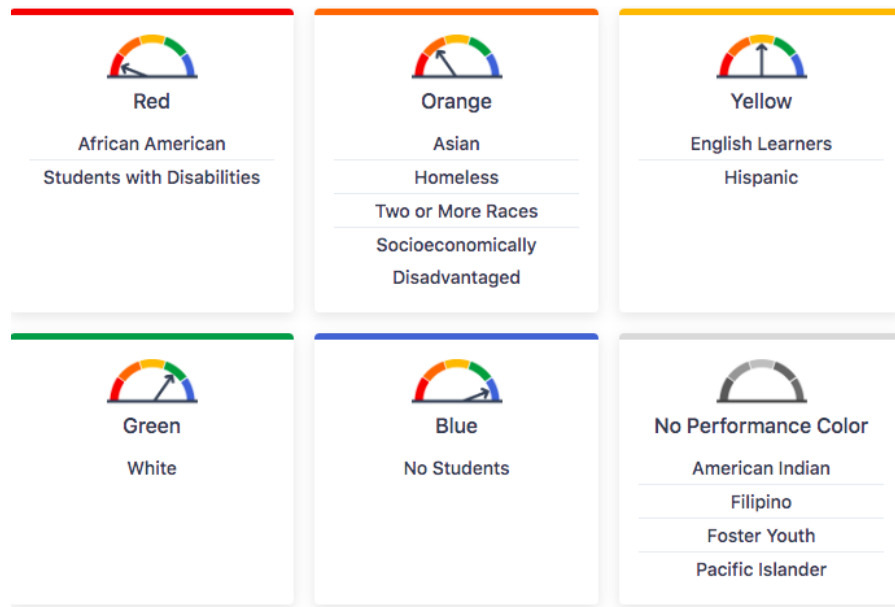


Fig. 6. Lincoln High suspension rate. Source: *California School Dashboard, 2018 Suspension Rate Student Group Details by Performance Levels by State of California Department of Education*

As most other schools, Lincoln has a Code of Conduct which outlines general procedures and definitions. It states disciplinary policies for minor misconduct such as electronic device usage and dress code violations to theft, possession, vandalism and sexual harassment. What is interesting but not surprising about its suspension rates and discipline data is that African American students have the highest suspension rates. The nation has historically targeted and criminalized Blacks and African Americans. Schools have a long history of being spaces of authoritarian neoliberalism. They are sites which surveil and punish the people they attempt to control. As previous scholars have noted, the school-to-prison pipeline is directly related to neoliberalism.

Lincoln holds a negative reputation not only for its academic underperformance but also for the violence experienced on the school grounds and its refusal to do anything about it. In 2017-2018 a Samoan and Black family filed a lawsuit against SDUSD for discrimination and failure to provide their sons fair and equal public education. The family claimed that Lincoln High officials “... failed to protect two brothers, Tariq and Shamiko Jr., from being bullied and beaten at school, one to the point of unconsciousness and a concussion.” (Taketa, 2019). What is even more disturbing is that in the lawsuit, the family states the school security guards were often bystanders in the bullying incidents/attacks. Regardless, the school proceeded to suspend Shamiko Jr. for a day after the bullying incident. While the mother appealed the suspension, SDUSD rejected it since they believed the school was in compliance with all policies and procedures. The boys missed days of school as they lived in fear of “getting in trouble or for being blamed for

causing trouble” (Taketa, 2019). While this is only one example of preemptive criminalization, it is a recurring experience that Black and Latino Youth endure on a daily basis. They understand that the police or security guards on site are not their allies. Much like Shamiko Jr.’s and Tariq’s case, Black and Latino youth are often treated guilty until proven innocent. In this way, students are conditioned in a framework of criminalization. This type of framework is also mirrored in the way neoliberalism operates on a national level. The policing of Blacks and Latinos is not only limited to school settings, it occurs everywhere: on the streets, in malls, at grocery stores. Under NCLB, one way in which the education system reinforced this neoliberal agenda of criminalization through its harsh disciplinary and “zero-tolerance” policies. While suspension did not immediately lead to prison, studies have shown that students who were suspended, were more likely to end up in jail or a juvenile system.

Here, it is also important to make the connection between poverty and the production of tensions and violence. As scholars have explored, students’ exposure to violence in their communities correlates with low academic performance, specifically affecting their gpa. The violence decreases their interest in school (Borofsky, Kellerman, Baucom, Oliver, & Margolin, 2013). This is evident in Lincoln’s case with its alarming underperformance rates and the correlation that has with the neighborhood’s increased poverty and gang-related violence, but it is even more clear in Tariq’s and Shamiko Jr.’s case. Following the incident, one of them admitted to not being able to concentrate in class, fearing of being bullied and, hence, wanting to stay home. The prevalence of violence inside and outside of school directly affects student academic performance.

As aforementioned, ESSA is concerned with giving more power to the state to regulate and discipline students. Taking a knife to school is a zero-tolerance policy in the SDUSD system, but on January 2018 when a student took a knife to school, Lincoln’s administration refused to do anything about it. Two weeks later, that same student stabbed a classmate (Koran, 2018). Lincoln has a tendency for downplaying the violence that occurs on its campus. Perhaps it is because it occurs too frequently or because the school wants to improve its reputation by lowering its suspension and expulsion rates. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that part of the problem lies in Lincoln’s inability to make sense of its growing violence. It is so prevalent that faculty and staff began issuing “blue slips” as a disciplinary action, sending students home for the day if students misbehave. The school was not required to report it as an official suspension if it issued a blue slip. Lincoln’s suspension rates would have been much higher had the school reported every single blue slip issued in 2017-2018. These unofficial day suspensions not only disrupt student learning, they also represent a loophole in the accountability system. Under ESSA expulsion and suspension rates are to be made public. They are also supposed to reflect how the rates differ depending on race and socioeconomic status. The increased violence has already prompted parents to remove their children from Lincoln,

sending them to other schools outside their neighborhoods. The rhetoric of competition that neoliberalism promotes not only affects students individually, it affects schools as a whole. Hence, schools often try to find loopholes in the system so as not to harm their reputation, subsequently losing students, and getting shut down.

Lincoln's findings clearly show that at least in this case, neoliberal reform has not made much of a positive impact on low-income students of color. Although neoliberal reforms use inclusive language such as "fair" and "equal opportunity for all," the statistics prove that Black and Latino students are improving at a much lower rates than their counterparts.

PART V

LIMITATIONS, POSSIBLE SOLUTION(S) & LOOKING BEYOND

Limitations

Part of this paper's goal is to connect the national and local discourses on neoliberalism and education by analyzing policy and reform through theory and by providing an example on how neoliberal ideology affects students on a more local level. This ambitious goal, however, has its limitations. Of course, the example's results do not speak for all low-income public schools in the United States where the majority of students are Latino and Black. Results vary depending on locations and specified state policies. Nonetheless, the example speaks to the larger, institutional forces that affect students similarly across the board. Additionally, this thesis was inspired by my own experience as a low-income first-generation Latina. While it is not free of bias, it highlights how the personal and institutional are always interconnected. Lastly, the solutions in this paper do not directly address changes in federal and state policies, rather, they focus on what low-income first-generation students of color can do collectively to challenge the nation's dominant ideology. It does, however, recognize that a new form of dialogue about social issues will not suffice as there must be a change in the political sphere as well.

Solution(s)

In order to have effective change, we must focus on the ideologies that drive our education system rather than simply enhancing the services provided to low-income students of color, which is like putting a band-aid on a wound that requires surgery. The current education system informed by neoliberalism polices students of color and reinforces their subjectivity as unfit and in need of constant supervision. Students must be conscious of their own opposition to the neoliberal government which governs in very micro, mundane ways. We must understand that what is happening to us, our circumstances, and what we experience on an everyday basis is not random or our fault. Rather, our quotidian lives are informed by neoliberal *governmentality*.

The solution to the neglected inequity in education through neoliberal policies and reforms should not be a nostalgic one. This paper does not argue the archaic notion that students should be forced to attend their neighborhood schools. There have been many instances where state deregulation has proven advantageous for students. We see the theme of moving control from the state and federal governments in cases such as *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, where the Supreme Court deemed The Compulsory Education Act of 1922 (which required parents/guardians to send their children between ages 8-16 to the public school in the district they resided) unconstitutional as it violated the 14th amendment. Instead, this paper argues for a collective form of intervention on behalf of low-income students of color, one that begins with thinking critically about interpellation and ways to resist it. Our histories and experiences as marginalized people of color allow for a collective thinking, one that counters the dominant ideology. Borrowing from Marx's notion of relative autonomy, I argue we must create communities and organizations at high school levels, not just in college, that initiate counter-ideological discourses. The first step is to submerge ourselves in spaces of productive dialogue, where we can think and talk about issues such as identity and subject-formation. These spaces of critical thinking will yield to agency and intervention, restoring the importance of the social. Rituals, practices, the quotidian life all reproduce neoliberal ideals. To fight that, we must also incorporate discourses of social justice and the common good in our most mundane tasks. Neoliberalism derives from the nation's hegemony, its dominant assumptions. In the same vein, the sub-ideologies that we produce derive from holes and deficiencies in the dominant system. Part of the challenge is that neoliberalism's infiltration in the education system does not readily allow for these type of discourses as students are conditioned to be machine-like beings concerned with attaining good grades and high test scores. Neoliberalism itself is a phenomenon that, both, creates inequality and sustains it. Students are valued upon how well they perform on standardized tests, not on how they can think critically about the social conditions imposed on them. There is no "incentive," really, for generating specific spaces of relative autonomy.

My sense of social justice began when I entered graduate school because the classroom itself was a space where people "checked" one another's prejudice, racism, sexism, etc. Even though I had experienced marginalization from the moment I enrolled in school as a kindergartener, it was not until I attained higher education that I was able to connect the public domain with the private. In a sense, this research project helped me work through my constructed identity. It enlightened me on the detrimental impact neoliberal ideology has on low-income students of color like myself, but more than that, on our construction and reproduction as neoliberal subjects, market actors, and human capital. It is my hope that students begin this reflexive process at a much younger age. Neoliberalism's war is not just on higher education. It is a war on some of the nation's most vulnerable youth and their communities. The creation of spaces for relative

autonomy will allow students to think critically about interpellation and subjectivity. It will allow students to pinpoint the specific moments in which their identities are constructed (be it through and by law or another medium). The process of critical thinking about subject-formation will lead us to claim our agency and successfully intervene in the best ways we find possible. We have lived through the repercussions of unequal distribution of resources and poverty; our communities have endured racism, displacement, and violence because of it. Youth have more power than they think and if change is not coming from above, it should start from within. We need a movement among low-income first-generation students of color that seeks to restore social democracy.

Moving Forward: The Power of Language

I noticed a recurring challenge throughout my research as I sought to understand neoliberalism's impact on student subject-formation and subjectivity. It is my hope that as low-income first-generation and students of color we may be able to identify the exact moments our identities are being created as well as when we are being interpellated so that we may challenge the dominant ideologies that suppress us. This ambitious goal of mine, however, was challenged once again as I could only speculate through theory how governmentality functions in creating neoliberal subjects. While I am not undermining the importance of theory in helping us understand subject-formation and subjectivity, I strongly believe it would be useful to have a body of scholarship that analyzes how low-income first-generation students of color truly view themselves within the larger framework of neoliberalism. Are they aware they are being valued as human capital? Do they know when they are being interpellated? How do they conceptualize their educational experience in the U.S.? In thinking about this, I recalled Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* and their assertion that metaphors are an integral part of our everyday lives as they shape our understanding of our present and future. They contend that metaphor pervades in thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 4). Since thought often governs action, and metaphors are embedded in thought, it is therefore inevitable for metaphors to shape our perception of our most mundane practices. Metaphor can therefore be used as a way to not only analyze how systems of oppression work, but also how individuals navigate these systems. If there is one metaphor I found in analyzing neoliberal policies in education is that education is a marketplace. Growing up, I never conceptualized it in this way. Perhaps I thought of my educational experience as a journey or struggle, but never a market place. In the future I would like to explore the conceptual mapping of such metaphor by employing Lakoff and Johnson's framework. In their work they state:

“But our conceptual system is not something we are normally aware of. In most of the little things we do every day, we simply think and act more or less automatically along certain lines. Just what these lines are is by no means obvious. One way to find out is by looking at language. Since

communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what the system is like” (124).

Language can help us understand the conceptual mapping of metaphor. The students themselves may not even be aware they are using metaphor to describe their experiences, but a close analysis of the language they use will help reveal how they view the education system. The language they use will be, as Lakoff & Johnson described, “an important source of evidence for what the system is like. Language also allows us to mediate our suffering, marginalization, and displacement.

Henry G. Giroux ends his book *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education* by stating the following:

[A viable politics]... is about more than reclaiming the virtues of dialogue, exchange, and translation. It is about recovering a politics and inventing a language that can create democratic public spheres in which new subjects and identities can be produced that are capable of recognizing and addressing the plight of the other and struggling collectively to expand and deepen the ongoing struggle for justice, freedom, and de-mocratization (Giroux, 205).

Neoliberal ideology wants to make us believe that we are in this fight alone. It conditions us into thinking that our struggles as low-income first-generation students of color are products of our own doing and that if we fail to take individual responsibility, we are unworthy of success. We are often labeled as “at-risk” students, violent, and unproductive. That is not true. Neoliberalism and Capitalism thrive only by privileging some at the expense of others. We have shared experiences and histories that allow for a re-articulation of the dominant narrative, let us use that to begin a new discourse of change, possibility, and hope.

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